

cigar aficionado

A portrait of Adam Rayner, a man with a dark beard and mustache, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and red patterned tie. He is holding a cigar in his right hand. The background is a solid teal color.

THE GOOD LIFE MAGAZINE FOR MEN

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GOLF
WHY EUROPEAN
PROS WIN IN
THE U.S.

REVIVING
DOWNTOWN
VEGAS

CUBA
HAVANA'S
CLASSIC CARS

82
CIGARS
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Tobacco Use Increases The Risk Of Infertility,
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july/august 2016

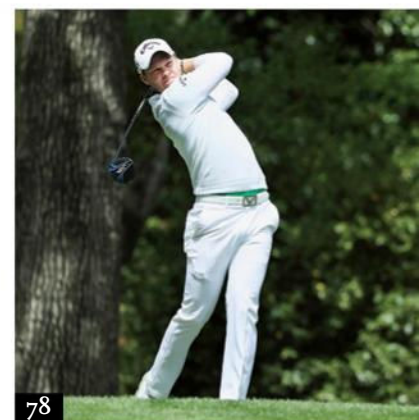
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Adam Rayner faces intrigue in "Tyrant" on cable TV's FX.
photograph by David Yellen



* **TABAQUERO** *

-HAMLET PAREDES-



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highlights

Nicaraguan cigars continue to perform at the very highest level in our blind tastings. This issue's top scores went to Nicaraguan brands of unparalleled pedigree, Padrón and Oliva. The Padrón was crafted to celebrate the 50-year anniversary of the brand, which was created in 1964. CIGAR AFICIONADO had already rated the widely available boxed version, but this is our first rating for the version available only in humidors. Thanks to a refill program from the company, and the fact that retailers are selling the cigars individually, we decided to put the cigar in our blind tasting process—and we are quite happy we did. Tying it at 94 points is the Oliva Serie V Melanio Robusto, crafted in honor of the first member of that family to grow tobacco. Among our other top scorers, note the performance of the CAO Colombia Bogota. This is turning out to be a superb time for CAOs, which rank as our current No. 3 Cigar of the Year.



TOP CORONA GORDA
PADRÓN 50TH ANNIVERSARY
LIMITED EDITION (NATURAL)

It's hard to make a cigar that has both power and nuance, but this rare Padrón does just that, combining hints of leather, wood and almonds.

NICARAGUA

94



TOP ROBUSTO
OLIVA SERIE V MELANIO ROBUSTO

This brand received our highest accolade by winning Cigar of the Year in 2014 for the Figurado size; the Robusto proved superb in its own right.

NICARAGUA

94



TOP CHURCHILL
BOLIVAR CORONA GIGANTE

Rich, earthy and brimming with pleasant notes of coffee, this large-format Bolivar stands alone atop our Churchill category.

CUBA

93



TOP FIGURADO
E.P. CARRILLO SELECCIÓN OSCURO PIRAMIDES ROYAL

CIGAR AFICIONADO Hall of Fame member Ernesto Perez-Carrillo delivers another superb smoke with this dark, chocolatey torpedo.

DOM. REP.

93



TOP GRANDE
CAO COLOMBIA BOGOTA

This CAO Bogota (which has tobaccos from four countries, including Colombia) scored highest in our newest category, dedicated to fat cigars.

NICARAGUA

92



TOP PETIT CORONA
H. UPMANN PETIT CORONA

Chewy, sweet and packing flavor belying its diminutive size, this small Cuban is the perfect smoke when time is short.

CUBA

91

GLENMORANGIE

SINGLE MALT SCOTCH WHISKY



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Obama Administration Overregulates Cigars

In yet another example of Washington's antibusiness policies, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration announced sweeping new regulations on the American cigar industry on May 5. If left unopposed, they will radically reshape the handmade cigar business in this country and threaten your legal right to smoke a cigar.

The rules are onerous. They include the banning of free cigar samples, a prohibition on releasing new cigar brands (even new sizes to existing brands) without lengthy and expensive government approval and the requirement for large government warnings on cigar boxes.

This is overregulation of the worst sort.

Requiring government approval for new products is the harshest of the FDA rules. Any cigar that was not on the market on February 15, 2007—nearly 10 years ago—will have to undergo a registration and approval process that could cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. That's a vast sum, especially for small companies.

The handmade sector of the cigar industry produces only 300 million cigars annually, a fraction of the 12 billion machine-made cigars sold each year. Many of the companies that make handmade cigars are small, making cigars by hand in artisanal fashion, using time-honored methods. They are produced solely from tobacco leaves and sold to adults, most of whom smoke them in moderation.

The FDA rules were aimed at Big Tobacco, at cigarettes, but the real punishment is being meted out to the little guy. It's a classic example of big government impeding small business.

These anti-cigar restrictions were crafted by a bureaucracy that disregards common sense and freedom. The rulings are the work of Mitch Zeller, the director for the Center for Tobacco Products, created by the Obama Administration in 2009. This organization has shown only contempt for the cigar industry.

As this issue was being printed, the FDA rulings had yet to go into effect. The ordinance becomes law in August, but even then there will be a period of as many as two years before all the changes are implemented.

There is still hope. There are bills in the House of Representatives and in the Senate—supported by both Republicans and Democrats—that would carve out an exemption for handmade cigars, keeping them away from the burden of these FDA regulations. Making those bills into law requires support, and your voice can help.

Reach out to your Congressmen and Senators now to tell them you want an exemption for the handmade cigar industry. Visit this website, <http://bit.ly/1ThXnGg>, enter your zip code and reach out to your legislators.

The threat is real, and only a unified action by cigar lovers can stop Washington from ruining this industry. Act today.

MARVIN R. SHANKEN
EDITOR & PUBLISHER

DAVID SAVONA
EXECUTIVE EDITOR



#1 Cigar of the Year

2014

cigar
aficionado
RATED **96**

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out of the humidor

Dear Marvin,

Thank you very much for standing up to Nick Enns' comments [Out of the Humidor, June 2016]. I was surprised to read his ridiculous views. I, for one, only buy the best cigars I can afford and own an Omega Planet Ocean 600 meters and an Oris BC3 Silver Lake Edition. These watches are my most important possessions, after my kids and wife.

I completely disagree with his opinions that young people don't use fine timepieces because every phone has the time. This is like telling a young lady you don't need a \$15,000 diamond ring because you can see pictures of one on your phone.

Ernesto Valenzuela
San Diego, California

Dear Marvin,

Since I can remember, the cigar has been a part of my life. Growing up I remember my grandfather and my dad would smoke cigars and play cards. My grandfather would smoke that cigar until I could not even see it.

I smoked my first cigar when I graduated high school. It was a wonderful experience. Since that day, the cigar has been with me, my family and friends, whether it was out of relief for my sister's surgery or whether it was birthday parties for my son and daughter, there has always been a cigar around me. When I married the love of my life I gave my groomsmen the best gift I could give them—their favorite cigars.

I work the night shift and a lot of times after working 12 or 13 hours I will smoke a cigar on the way home. I've read your magazine now for years and support you as you fight for the rights of us who enjoy the peaceful and relaxing experiences that the cigar gives to us.

Andy Nelson
Lewisburg, Tennessee

Dear Marvin,

I find it interesting that one party wants the government out of our bedrooms, but in our pocketbooks, while the other wants them out of our pocketbooks but in our bedrooms. How about keeping the government out of our private lives in general, the way it was meant to be?

Steve St. John
Via Facebook



"I've read your magazine now for years and support you as you fight for the rights of us who enjoy the peaceful and relaxing experiences that the cigar gives to us."

—Andy Nelson, Lewisburg, Tennessee

Dear Marvin,

It's funny how the FDA concerns itself with having a "new stance" on reregulating and over taxing such an already taxed, historic and devoted industry such as premium cigars but has no problem with "overlooking" the overuse of cancer-causing paint thinners, dyes, artificial flavors in everyday foods and poisoning prescription drugs. Hey FDA, leave my Montecristos alone.

KC Stark
Via Facebook

Correction

The Good Life Guide article on the LG OLED G6 TV [June] incorrectly stated that users could stream HBO Go through the set's operating system.

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E-MAIL letters@cigaraficionado.com • **LETTERS** 825 8th Ave., 33rd floor, New York, NY 10019 • **EDITORS' BLOGS** Find out what the editors of CIGAR AFICIONADO are thinking—and smoking—in our editors' blogs. David Savona, Gordon Mott, Jack Bettridge, Gregory Mottola and Andrew Nagy want to hear from you. The conversation is taking place on cigaraficionado.com.

cigar aficionado

Printed in the U.S.A.

A publication of M. Shanken Communications, Inc.
Worldwide Plaza, 825 Eighth Avenue, New York, NY 10019
212/684-4224 fax: 212/684-5424 e-mail: letters@cigaraficionado.com

VOL. 24 NO. 5

Editor & Publisher **MARVIN R. SHANKEN**

Executive Editor	DAVID SAVONA
Senior Features Editor	JACK BETTRIDGE
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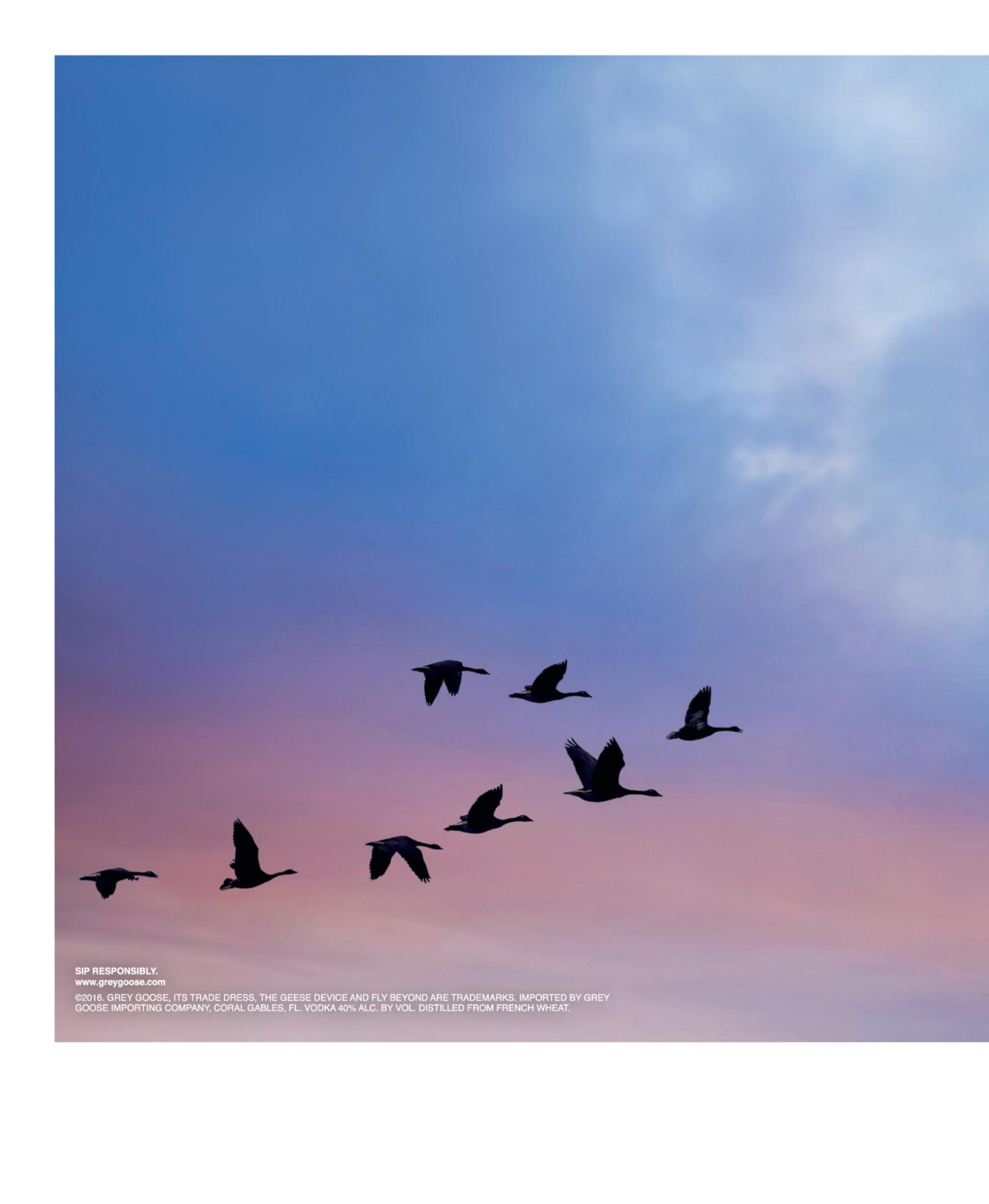


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A flock of geese is captured in flight against a vast, colorful sky. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the top to a soft purple and pink near the horizon, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The geese are silhouetted against this vibrant background, flying in a loose V-formation. Their wings are spread, and their long necks are visible. The overall mood is serene and expansive.

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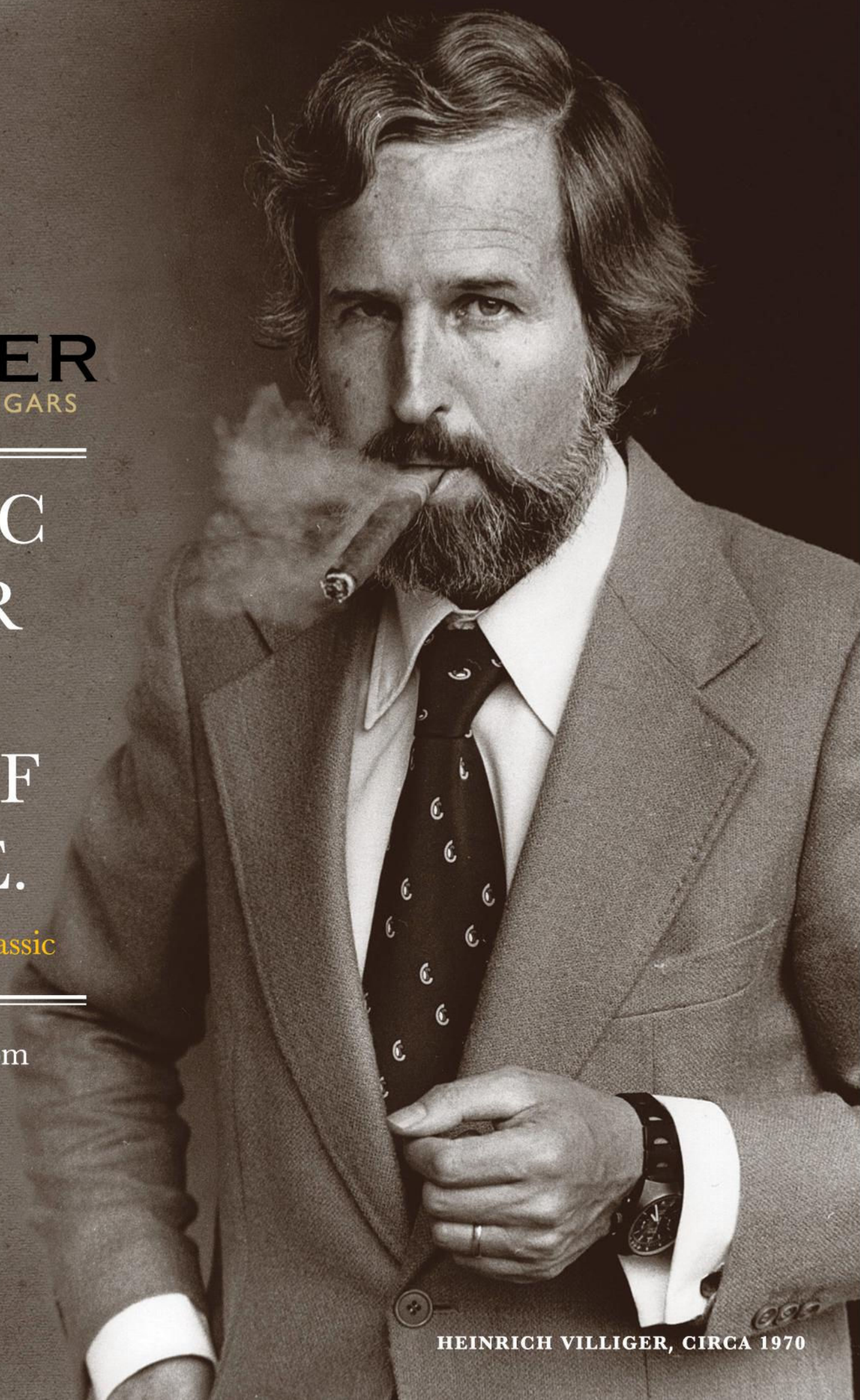


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good life guide

Living well demands that we indulge in things that are of superior quality and excellent origin. This guide aspires to find and recommend the best of everything to aficionados of the good life.

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WANTED



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be wanted for something great."*

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Gear for the Great Outdoors

It's summertime—that means barbecues, the beach and boating. You've got your sunglasses on and your favorite cigars in hand, but you're unsure which cigar accessories to take with you. Pocket space is limited, and some of your finer, more delicate tools are poorly suited for the outdoors. Others are just too heavy or cumbersome to carry around.

Happily, cigar gear engineered for on-the-go performance won't weigh you down while you're enjoying the weather. For transporting cigars, consider the GRAMM Works Travel Humidor (top left, \$80). Made with sturdy, aircraft-grade aluminum and sporting a built-in hygrometer cap and lower-level humidification cap, this travel piece can carry four to five Churchill-sized cigars at constant humidity, thanks to the Boveda pack in the bottom of the cylinder. If you're going anywhere near the water, try the Vanderburgh One Travel Cylinder (middle right, \$123). It functions as an airtight and waterproof single-cigar capsule.

S.T. Dupont takes outdoor conditions seriously, and its Défi Extreme torch lighter (center, \$280) is designed to perform at high altitudes and under severe temperatures. Its jet-blue flame is powerful enough to withstand winds of up to 25 mph—so a summer breeze is little challenge.

It might be a good idea to also bring along the Xikar Tech Quad Flame Lighter (middle left, \$74.99), with its four jet flames and oversized fuel tank, making it a handy accessory for longer trips or full-day events.

In a cigar cutter, you'll want something small and lightweight that can fit on your keychain, like the Colibri Monza Punch Cutter (bottom left, \$39), with its 9-mm double-honed twist retractable blade, or the Xikar MTX Multi Tool (bottom right, \$54.99) a pair of stainless-steel folding cigar scissors that come equipped with two screwdrivers, a cigar poker and a bottle opener. The screwdrivers can adjust the flame of your lighter, and the bottle opener keeps the drinks flowing.

Every courteous boat captain and barbecue guest wants to avoid a mess by keeping his ash and cigar ends out of sight. The Xikar Leather Wrapped Executive Ashtray Can (top right, \$27.99) is a lightweight solution that fits into most cup holders, and does an exceptional job of containing ashes and odors.

Visit grammworks.com, vanderburghhumidors.com, st-dupont.com, colibri.com and xikar.com

—David Clough



2017 Camaro Convertible

If the muscle car called Camaro set hearts aflame in 2009 when Chevy revived it after years of abandonment, it truly gave its long-dominant rival, the Mustang, a run for its money with the completely made over 2016 edition. Now, its partner, the 2017 Camaro Convertible, is shaking up the ragtop sector with its own impressive credentials.

Both models ride atop a new and, unexpectedly, smaller platform, shared with the Cadillac ATS sedan. That pairing may have been a concession to the bean counters' bent for "economies of scale," but buyers made out, too. The underlying platform and suspension are more sophisticated and nimble, transforming what was long little more than a straight-line sled into the sort of machine you can happily flog around the tightest of corners, giving chase not only to a Mustang, but such vaunted imports as the BMW 3-Series.

While ragtops typically sacrifice some body stiffness—early versions of the Camaro Convertible were as limp as an overcooked ramen noodle—that's not so this time 'round. By baking the *al fresco* model into the initial equation, the new convertible (starting at \$33,695) maintains virtually all of the coupe's rigidity. Translation: it's solid as a rock.

Meanwhile, the clunky old convertible mechanism that seemed to require three hands to operate is now a one-touch affair that opens or closes in seconds—and it can be operated either from the key fob or a button on the center console at speeds up to 30 mph. Forget fitting a

plastic tonneau cover around the top when it's down. The cover now deploys automatically. And Chevy designers have done a good job of eliminating that bowed, "hungry horse" appearance when the top is up. The downside is somewhat limited rear visibility.

Inside, the new Camaro is much more refined, with upscale materials and a very driver-centric instrument panel. The optional navigation system is easy to use and the infotainment system now runs both Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, while also offering a 4G LTE Wi-Fi hot spot.

The 2017 Camaro Convertible is available with any of the engine packages offered for the coupe: that includes the peppy, mid-range V-6, and even the 455-horsepower Camaro SS edition. And yes, that big 6.2-liter LT1 engine actually churns out the same number of ponies as the latest-generation Chevrolet Corvette Stingray. The big surprise is the new 2.0-liter turbo-four which offers a lot more fun than its small displacement suggests, as we recently discovered during a day's run from Las Vegas down into the sun-scorched Death Valley. The jaunt literally gave us the chance to scorch the tires when we switched to the LT1 package.

For a car that seemed destined for the automotive graveyard, Camaro managed a remarkable resurrection. The new convertible is one more reason it's gaining traction among muscle car fans.

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—Paul A. Eisenstein



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WARNING: Smoking cigars regularly poses risks of cancer of the mouth, throat, larynx, and esophagus similar to smoking cigarettes.



The Gin & Tonic

The quintessential summer drink has its recipe right in its name: Gin & Tonic. But it's not that simple. Ignore the details and you squander the chance to make this classic quaff sublime. Choose wisely and you'll build an effervescent testament to tropical refreshment. Mix blindly and you're headed for the doldrums. Or worse—consider that in some unenlightened cultures Gin & Tonic is available in a can—you can't even choose the proportions!

Happily, the individual ingredients are enjoying a renaissance. The primary element (gin) is being revived as mixologists have rediscovered its place in timeless tipling, and craft distillers are widening the possibilities with novel botanicals. Gin is essentially very complex, flavored vodka. Dozens of aromatics can be added (either during distillation or afterwards, the former is usually better), but the defining characteristic is juniper. For this drink, we champion gin strong on juniper's bracing flavor. And for that you turn to such London Dry gins as Beefeater, Tanqueray, Bombay Sapphire, Boodles and Gordon's—all fit the bill, but with their special variations. Plymouth, though technically not a London Dry, matches the taste profile. A relatively new entrant, Fords, chose juniper notes in pointed contrast to the new trend in craft gin.

The gin rebirth has brought a brave new world of formulae. Hendrick's, with cucumbers, and Citadelle, with spice-forward cinnamon and nutmeg, were forerunners. Nolet speaks of Turkish roses and its hyperpremium version has verbena and saffron. There's no shortage of creative notes in the craft market—lavender, pecan, hibiscus, grape flowers, Fuji apple—but the lemon-infused Malfy is perhaps most heretical—not for its flavoring, but its claim that the origin of gin is Italy, which will raise the ire of the English and Dutch.

Tonic is getting its due as well. A long decline began with the appearance of soda guns in bars and continued as quinine, the ingredient that makes it a palliative for malaria, disappeared. Check your tonic bottle. If it doesn't say quinine, it doesn't have any. Brands like Fever-Tree and the tonic concentrate Jack Rudy make a feature of that tangy, tart flavor. You can also customize by making your own with cinchona bark (quinine's source) and following Internet recipes.

Don't forget a garnish. The classic is lime, but lemon is quite popular, as is combining the two. Some even get their citrus kick from orange. And whatever some stuffy purist might tell you, ice is essential. Otherwise, what makes it a summer drink?

—Jack Bettridge

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Renting Private Estates

A woven white hammock is slung between two palm trees on the beach at Valley Trunk. The rustle of the swaying fronds and the sound of the surf breaking against giant granite boulders provide a soothing soundtrack. Nearby, an *al fresco* lunch is laid out in the Indonesian-style Bali House that was discovered in Bali and transported to the idyllic shores of Virgin Gorda in the British Virgin Islands.

This family-owned slice of paradise, which recently opened for exclusive-use rental, offers the alluring combination of unsullied views, impeccable service and luxurious accommodations, only to be found in a private island estate. Forget slumming in five-star hotels and step up to the luxury of layouts like Valley Trunk. The 19 lush and manicured acres rise from the sea to a rocky peak, upon which the sprawling residence is built around a free-form swimming pool. Parties of up to 16 are accommodated in eight ocean-view suites, including the master suite atop the main building with wraparound vistas of the Sir Francis Drake Channel and Tortola in the distance. Rates (starting at \$77,700 per week) include meals and beverages, plus use of a 68-foot power yacht for island hopping, sunset cruises and diving excursions.

Travelers desiring the intimacy of a private estate without straying too far off the beaten path may be more inclined towards Nandana, located within a sequestered enclave on the West End of the Grand Bahama Island. With easy access to outside entertainment and nightlife—such as private air charters to neighboring islands, casino nights and

golf—this exclusive compound is ideal for island goers who want to stay close to the action. The ocean bay-front property, which accommodates 12 guests (starting at \$13,000 a night), is centered around the Eastern-themed Great Hall, decorated with a grandiose art collection of imported antiques from Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. Surrounding the 120-foot-long infinity pool are five freestanding bedroom suites, including a tented safari-style canopy that combines the breezy outdoors with modern amenities like air conditioning, Internet and a full bathroom.

Yet ultimate seclusion falls along the shores of the Bahamas' Exuma islands, where the only footprints left on the ultra-luxe white-sand beaches will be your own. At Musha Cay (pictured) at Copperfield Bay, a 700-acre island owned by world-renowned illusionist David Copperfield, guests have the opportunity to rent an entire private island all for themselves. Starting at \$39,000 per night, you and up to 23 of your guests can occupy five tropical cottages—each with its own wrap-around deck and private beach—including the 10,000-square-foot master suite with a 360-degree view of Musha Cay's 10 uninhabited neighboring islands. And if you're worried about living like a castaway on such a secluded island, not to worry, a full-service staff of over 30 people, including a world-class chef, is on hand to serve your around-the-clock needs. However, the five-piece tropical steel-drum band comes at an additional fee.

Visit valleytrunk.com, www.nandanavilla.com and www.mushacay.com

—Laurie Kahle and Blake Drosch





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Smartwatches Learn Luxury

“It’s not enough to have tradition, because tradition connects you to yesterday—we need to be connected to tomorrow,” said Jean-Claude Biver, CEO of TAG Heuer and president of LVMH Group’s Watches Division, during last fall’s debut of TAG Heuer’s Connected smartwatch developed with Intel and Google.

Confronted with the Apple Watch and other smartwatches, a handful of premier brands have responded with their own takes on the technology, but with a luxury twist. Last year, Montblanc introduced its e-Strap, a high-tech watchstrap that includes an activity tracker, smart notifications, remote control and Find-Me functions. Meanwhile, Breitling launched a connected chronograph, Exospace B55, which links via Bluetooth to your smartphone and exchanges data back and forth. Bulgari prefers to describe its Diagono Magnesium Concept as “intelligent,” as it does not have typical smartwatch functions but rather serves

as a digital data vault on the wrist. Plus the movement is mechanical, so it never requires a battery charge.

“This is a marriage between Silicon Valley and Swiss craftsmanship,” said Brian Krzanich, CEO of Intel Corporation, at the TAG Heuer Connected’s launch. “It looks like something I would want to wear.”

TAG Heuer’s designers aimed at both sexy and smart. Connected (\$1,700, as shown) is housed in a 49-mm titanium Carrera case, the brand’s flagship model. Inside is an Intel Atom processor that runs the Android Wear platform with thousands of apps. Connected is not a slave to your phone as it connects by Wi-Fi to the Cloud. And in two years, when the technology has advanced, you have the option to upgrade it or convert it to a mechanical watch.

Frederique Constant’s Horological Smartwatch looks even more like a traditional watch. Launched in 2015, the collection’s latest addition (\$1,295) comes in a 42-mm, rose-gold-plated steel case with a handsome navy-blue dial appointed with applied indexes and Roman numerals. Underneath the dial, Fullpower’s MotionX end-to-end technology platform links to your smartphone and tracks your activity, monitors sleep and features a world-timer function for frequent travelers. When the watch syncs with your smartphone, it automatically adjusts date and local time on the dial. The subdial at 6 o’clock shows how

close you are to reaching your activity or sleep goals, and the battery runs for up to two and a half years without needing to be charged.

Tissot’s 45-mm titanium Smart-Touch (\$1,100 to \$1,200), an evolution of the brand’s T-Touch Solar, is activated by touching the sapphire crystal and is powered by ambient light via an exposed photovoltaic cell. Smart-Touch links to your smartphone and other devices via Bluetooth and offers more than 30 functions including weather forecast, compass, altimeter and navigation.

While many in the upper echelons of Swiss watchmaking have dismissed tech watches as nothing more than disposable gadgets, others are finding ways to embrace the future on their own terms. And they’re just getting started.

Visit tagheuer.com, frederiqueconstant.com, tissotwatches.com

—Laurie Kahle

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Suiting Up for Summer

The downside of relaxed office dress codes is especially evident in the summer months, when the exigency to stay cool mistakenly leads to the over-casual boardroom T-shirts and shorts. Just because it's hot outside doesn't mean you can't suit up—especially now when fabric innovations are creating lightweight materials that come in interesting patterns.

In a different age, men had fewer choices for dressing up for summer. Out of necessity suits were limited to linens and cotton poplins, usually in solid tan hues and suitable for tropical outposts. The drawback is they wrinkle and wilt. Another choice is the laudable seersucker. Sadly, you see very little variation in that fabric. The color is typically regimented to light blue with white. The pattern is invariably pin cord—so much so that it's believed to be a defining characteristic. (The term seersucker refers to the intermittent puckered and smooth textures of the surface. The pattern can actually be anything from solid to plaid.) The navy-blue blazer was the other summer uniform alternative—admittedly not a lot of choice.

But check out the Kiton suit (\$9,445) pictured. It weaves cashmere (35 percent) with cotton and silk for a breathable material that supports a windowpane pattern and color tone that are anything but drab. Cooling wools are achieved with high-twisted yarn in an open weave that allows air to pass through. Sometimes called *fresco lana*, light wools confer sophistication as well as wickability, meaning they absorb sweat well. Wool also travels better (i.e., doesn't wrinkle as easily). In a loose hopsack weave, it bounces back from being balled up almost immediately. In a season when you're likely to be packing your bags quite a bit, this is quite an asset.

Wool isn't the only avenue for summer suiting. Silk has been a long-time favorite as has rayon (a man-made that wrongfully gets lumped in with

synthetics, but is actually generated from organic material). A new wrinkle (or actually non-wrinkle) are fabrics from bamboo and recycled paper.

Construction is also a large part of the makeup of a summer suit. Good choices are jackets that are unlined, half-lined or even have the spare shoulders of the Miami Vice look. Check the thermometer before donning three-piece or double-breasted suits. And for reasons we shan't bother to explain, avoid completely the vogue for suits with short pants.

Visit kiton.it/en

—Jack Bettridge



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LA HISTORIA



Nº2
Top 10/2014

Photo: Javier Celado

Hybrid Grills

In another incarnation I traveled the competitive barbecue circuit for a couple of years while researching a book about the delicious craziness of that world. Along the way I witnessed some very strange takes on what grills could be. Creative welders fashioned smokers in the shape of locomotives, they converted airplanes, refrigerators and even school buses into cookers. The one thing they mostly had in common was they were solely dedicated to burning wood to create smoke for the low ‘n’ slow smoking conditions that define barbecue.

As much as I respect the purity of such contraptions, for the purposes of cooking outdoors with limited patio space it’s impractical to have cookers committed to any one task, be it smoking, grilling or roasting. That’s why hybrid grills are so attractive. Check out the Kalamazoo Hybrid Fire Grill (pictured, \$11,295 to \$25,195). It cooks in a range of temperatures from 150° to 1,200° F. The Hybrid’s grilling drawer is what makes it hybrid. It slides between the gas burners and the grilling surface and can be loaded with any smoke producer from charcoal to wood chips to small logs for, say, ribs. Leave it empty, however, and you can sear a steak.

On a more budget-friendly level is the Char-Broil Digital Electric

Smoker (\$250 to \$300). You sacrifice the joy of playing with fire, but get the exacting temperature-setting standards (100° to 275° F) and remote-control options of the electronic age. A probe thermometer alerts you by Bluetooth when the meat is ready. A chamber thermometer regulates the heat in the box for as long as 19 hours (for that overnight brisket). You can smoke by filling a box with wood chips or simply roast (I made my Christmas prime rib in one). The locker-style set up, with multiple racks and available glass door, makes trays easily accessible and lets you cook anything from ribs to turkey, but not whole hog.

The convenience of the first-ever Summit Charcoal Grill from Weber (\$1,700 to \$2,300) is not so much cooking versatility, but ease of operation. Gas fires the smoking fuel (either charcoal or woodchips) and the Rapidfire lid damper hurries the quick start-up time. The dome’s double-wall construction adds insulation, regulates temperature, elongates cooking time and requires less charcoal. A hinged grill section makes it easier to add fuel and a hinged defuser plate allows cooking at lower temperatures.

Visit kalamazoooutdoor.com, charbroil.com and weber.com

—Jack Bettridge



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Serious Croquet

Maybe you've played a good-natured lawn game on a summer evening, using weather-beaten mallets to knock battered balls around a course of nine wickets in the thick grass and bumpy turf of your backyard. You may have even called it croquet. It was only by the loosest of definitions. At the elite level croquet is a cutthroat affair, played across the globe with high-end equipment on manicured lawns of exacting standards. And if you're thinking it's a lazy game for the out-of-shape, ponder the results of the recent world championship played at the National Croquet Center (NCC) in West Palm Beach, Florida, in April. The finals went on for 11½ hours. (They play by points, not rounds, like you do.)

That would have been a lot of Gin & Tonics (what seems to be the game's unofficial drink, see page 26), had the tilt been held by the members of the Algonquin Round Table. That famously boozy set (including Harpo Marx, pictured) became enthusiasts of the game back in the 1920s. But croquet actually traces its lineage to the 17th-century variations and organized under that name in 1856. The All-England Club at Wimbledon already had croquet before it hosted Grand Slam tennis. Part of croquet's charm is that it can be taken as seriously (in all white uniforms) or as casually (with cigar and cocktail in hand) as the players (of all ages) choose. Younger players dominate because of the stamina involved, but the latest champion is 62 years old.

The NCC is on the all-white-dress-code level of seriousness. Its 19 number courts are laser-level and maintained exactly like golf greens (except for one layout that is kept shaggy in deference to the nine-wicket backyard game). Oversized, varnished mallets can be borrowed, but dedicated players spend as much \$600 for their own at the pro shop. Competition courses have only six hoops, but they are so unforgivingly narrow as to have almost no tolerance for misguided shots. The Center (one of the 200 or so private croquet clubs in America) offers free lessons to nonmembers. And while the game seems maddeningly difficult at first, you'll soon find yourself able to pass balls through hoops. Niceties of the game—like long distance shots, using back spin to jump a ball that blocks a wicket and devious strategy (generally hitting your opponent to keep him from scoring)—take longer.

Inside NCC's mansion-like clubhouse is some respite from the treachery of competition. It houses dining rooms, ballrooms, the Croquet Museum and Hall of Fame (Harpo is a charter member) and, yes, a bar with that promised Gin & Tonic.

Visit nationalcroquetclub.roundtablelive.org

—Jack Bettridge





No Speed Limit

Lamborghini's Gallardo LP 610 Huracán has a 610-horsepower, V-10 under the hood, and can go from 0-60 in a blazing 2.9 seconds. Even if you have an extra quarter million dollars kicking around, it's hard to justify a limited-production supercar. But for just \$89 a lap, you can put the Huracán through its paces on the new 1.5 mile Formula One-style racetrack at SpeedVegas. If that's not enough, you can trade up to an equally powerful 210 mph Ferrari 458 Italia, or several other dream cars from Ferrari and Lamborghini, along with a few Porsches, the Mercedes AMG GT-S, Audi R8, Corvette ZO6, Shelby GT or Japan's signature high-horsepower muscle car, the Nissan GTR.

SpeedVegas is a brand new, \$30 million, 100-acre motorsports complex, 10 minutes from the heart of the touristic Strip. Its racetrack is patterned after international F1 venues and has 12 sweeping turns, banked up to 20 degrees, and a half-mile straightaway for putting the pedal to the metal. But it is not the only racetrack in Vegas, and not even the only one where you can take the wheel of a Huracán. Exotics Racing at the Las Vegas Motor Speedway offers a nearly identical lineup, plus a McLaren 570S and James Bond's Aston Martin Vantage GT, for hot laps around its 1.2 mile track.

Fast, shiny cars are a huge attraction in Sin City, but it is hardly the only place where you can experience the g-force thrills and grossly overpowered engines—with expert instruction and no speed limits. Several similar operations can be found around the country, and almost all feature Lamborghinis and Ferraris, while most also have Porsches, the R8 and GTR, with a few wildcards mixed in. Exotics Racing also has a

Southern California location with a purpose built 1.2 mile track in Fontana, 45 minutes from Los Angeles. In the Big Easy, Extreme Experience is based year round at the NOLA Motorsport Park with its 1.8 mile track just 20 minutes from New Orleans' French Quarter. Extreme Experiences also has a traveling roadshow, taking its cars to tracks around the country on select dates, including Boston, Pittsburgh, Austin, Chicago and many others. Dallas has its own full-time option, DriveXotic, based at the Motorsports Ranch in Cresson, Texas, with the usual suspects plus a Lotus Evora, Maserati GT MC Stradale and Dodge Viper SRT. In South Florida, Miami Exotic Auto Racing has two locations, at Homestead Miami Speedway and Palm Beach International Raceway.

Most sell track experiences by the lap (often with a three-lap minimum) and usually include some preliminary instruction, safety gear and sometimes a warm up lap. They also offer multicar packages: for example, in Miami, a nine-lap experience comes with three each in a Ferrari F430, Lamborghini Gallardo and Audi R8 for \$849. SpeedVegas has several theme packages, such as American Muscle, pairing the Corvette ZO6 and Shelby GT and an Italian Supercar package combining the Huracán and 458 Italia. At the world's most famous racetrack, the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, you can drive real open cockpit former race cars that actually competed in the Indianapolis 500. The engines have been detuned so your three laps around the Brickyard max out at "only" 130 mph.

Visit speedvegas.com, exoticsracing.com, drivexotic.com, miamiexoticautoracing.com and indianapolismotorspeedway.com

—Larry Olmsted



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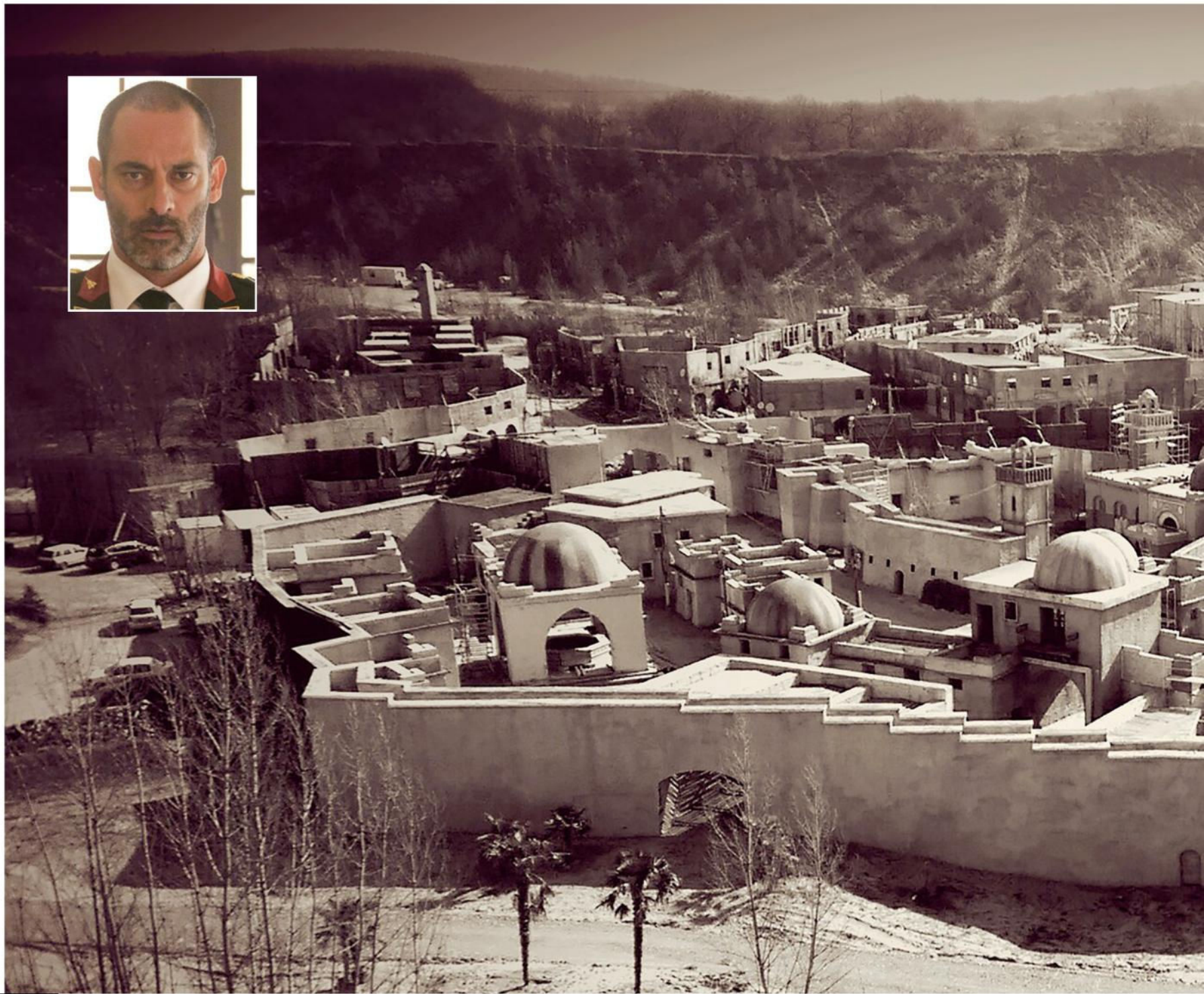
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Tyrants of the



Desert

Adam Rayner and the cast of “Tyrant” bring a story of power and betrayal alive in cable TV’s most exciting show

BY MARSHALL FINE

PORTRAITS BY DAVID YELLEN

On the outskirts of Budapest, Hungary, lies the \$4 million city created for the FX series “Tyrant.”



Adam Rayner, the star of “Tyrant,” photographed in Budapest, Hungary. In addition to the palatial set shown above, the producers constructed their own elaborate city (previous pages) to bring the show to life.

THE MEDIEVAL METROPOLIS OF Budapest, Hungary, sits astride the Danube River, a wonderfully preserved historic enclave that survived both World War II and Soviet rule to emerge as one of Eastern Europe’s most sophisticated cities, a vibrant jewel box full of Old-World charm. But a very different, even more ancient world has been constructed just a half-hour outside the city.

Astra Studios is a blocky gray building that looks like a multistory big-box discount store—think Walmart without the charm—dropped in the middle of the Hungarian countryside. Hidden inside is a paradise, the royally appointed presidential palace of the fictional Middle Eastern country of Abuddin, the setting of “Tyrant,” FX’s provocative and controversial series about the temptations of power and balancing the needs of family and country.

Adam Rayner looks extremely presidential as he sits in the splendor of the faux presidential dining room, waiting for his call to the set. A solid, wiry 6-foot-1, he’s poured into a black suit that lends a certain power to his chiseled good looks. He’s two episodes into filming the third season of “Tyrant,” which debuts on July 6 at 10 p.m. on FX.

His character, Bassam Al-Fayeed, has had quite the journey in two seasons, returning to the Middle East and his aristocratic heritage after a self-imposed 20-year exile. The sudden death of his father, the longstanding and hard-nosed ruler of Abuddin, leads him to stay to help his older brother rule the country—only to end up abandoned for dead by his brother, who proves to be even more ruthless than his father. Season 2 ends in a cliff-hanger, with Rayner’s character returning to the capital as a hero, his brother lying in his arms soaked in blood.



The intriguing FX series “Tyrant” shows how the quest for power can tear a family apart at the seams. Bassam Al-Fayeed (played by Adam Rayner, top photo, in black) gets a warm welcome from his brother Jamal (Ashraf Barhom) when he and his family land in Abuddin, returning for the first time in 20 years. When Jamal becomes president (above left), his cruelty leads to unrest, the brothers become adversaries, and Bassam ends up imprisoned (above).

In a show that was conceived as an Arab version of *The Godfather*, think of this as the moment when Michael Corleone replaces his late father and accepts this as his destiny.

Rayner is really feeling the new role his character has been thrust into: newly appointed “interim” president of Abuddin. How long will he be able to stay presidential? That’s another matter.

“Bassam keeps describing himself as ‘interim president,’” Rayner says. “But someone who can stick to that ‘interim’ label—that’s a rare beast. To have temporary power and then relinquish it? It doesn’t happen very often. The lines become blurred between exercising power as a necessity to keep the country together and a personal need for power.”

The journey of Rayner’s character—emotionally, physically—has been at the center of “Tyrant” since its 2014 debut and helped make it the

distinctive drama that it has become.

It’s the only series on network or cable set entirely in the Middle East, mirroring headlines of the turmoil in a region beset by ancient tribal and religious enmity. While series such as “24” and “Homeland” have used exotic locales as backdrops for individual storylines, the stories themselves were firmly rooted in the U.S. It took “Homeland” until its fifth season to focus all of its action outside the U.S.

Part of the reason is the cost of filming abroad: whether it’s importing experienced crew, exchange rates, the availability of suitable equipment, soundstages and housing or simply the language barrier, it usually costs less to film in the U.S. or Canada than in Europe or the Middle East. Then there’s also the question of viewer interest in people and stories set in other parts of the world.



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"The idea of doing a show that's not set in America is unthinkable—most networks wouldn't consider it," says executive producer Howard Gordon, the award-winning creator of such hits as "24" and "Homeland." "Maybe—maybe—someone would entertain the idea of a show set in London. Doing a show in the Middle East, with predominantly Middle Eastern characters? Forget it. But FX stepped up."

"Traditionally, shows not based in the United States have not fared well on American television, except maybe 'Masterpiece Theater,'" says Eric Schrier, president of original programming for FX Networks.

But "Tyrant" works, and thanks to lower costs of good facilities and crews in Hungary, it costs less to produce than "24" and "Homeland." And Gordon has a long-standing relationship with Fox, which aired "24" and whose parent News Corp. owns the FX cable network. "We wound up on FX because of [network president] John Landgraf's interest and passion to tell this story," says Gordon.

Despite FX sporting a tagline of "fearless" for its programming, Schrier admits that the show represented a risk—if only of being accused of taking sides or playing favorites, because there are so many factions at play in the Middle East.

"We try to take big swings," Schrier says of the series, whose ratings were consistent enough to earn it a third season. "A show set in the

Middle East? That's a big swing. The story was a really bold choice and that's why we're excited about it."

Taking a risk on ratings and revenue is one thing; filming in a war zone is something else. The entire production found itself in harm's way midway through the first season when war broke out in Israel, near where the production was filming.

"Let's say this show had its challenges, production-wise, that first season," Schrier says. "I mean, they were shooting rockets."

Recalls Gordon, "We picked up like a circus without permits, cast and crew, and relocated to Turkey and completed the season. Even then, there were issues of safety that made it hard for us to be bonded and insured."

For the second and third seasons, the entire production relocated to Budapest. For the third season, the palace interior has been expanded and elaborated upon in the soundstage confines. The palace rooms dazzle with their blend of gold, burnished wood and deep jewel tones. Historic-looking oil paintings share space with what appear to be actual antique pieces.

The personal chambers and official offices are spacious, laid out so that cameras can trail the presidential family members, their servants and underlings as they move through their lives. A lavish dining room, classically appointed in dark earth tones, opens into the dramatically lit (and extremely contemporary) kitchen.



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The studio is not far from the series' exterior set, a \$4 million location that could double for the deserts of the Middle East.

A mile or so from the studio, down a barely paved road into a sand quarry, the production has built its own multipurpose city, with both interior and exterior sets. The city normally stands in for Ma'an, an oil-dominated border-desert town on the opposite side of the country from the palace. The city is home to various resistance forces, terrorists and other extremists that threaten the ruling power structure in Abuddin.

"We essentially built a backlot that houses a desert, a Bedouin village, a military base and a mid-sized city," Gordon says, "and that's impressive by any standards."

Enter on one side of that town and you're in a burned-out neighborhood with a tank sitting in the street. Turn a corner and there are cameras positioned outside a mosque. Step through an arched doorway to the outside of city walls and you face sand dunes that can double for the desert. Walk past one of the ubiquitous carved-wooden screens and you're in the square of the local university, which is a hotbed of protest against the regime.

The real drama, however, swirls around the palace, where Bassam Al-Fayeed stands squarely in the middle of all of it. Once an unassuming Arab-American doctor, now the new leader of a nation in political turmoil, the character is changing Adam Rayner's life, though he initially tried to avoid the role.



In Season 2 of "Tyrant," Adam Rayner's Bassam is living under a new identity in the desert, and ends up leading a team of freedom fighters in a battle to save his country from terrorist forces seeking its destruction.

"When the script was first sent, I was quite busy so I was trying to get out of sending in my audition tape," he says. "My manager, to her credit, insisted."

The series pilot opened with Rayner as Barry Al-Fayeed, an Arab-born pediatrician living the American dream in Pasadena with his wife and teenage children. But Barry is actually Bassam Al-Fayeed, the son of the dictator of Abuddin. His backstory: After college, Bassam rejected his upbringing and left Abuddin for the United States, where he changed his name to Barry and went to medical school. Fully Westernized, with an American wife and two teenage children, he had not been back to his homeland in 20 years, when he agreed to return for the wedding of his nephew—the son of Barry's older brother, Jamal (Ashraf Barhom), the heir apparent to the presidency.

When their father dies unexpectedly, Jamal asks Barry to stay in Abuddin and help him run the country. Barry does, a decision that leads to his challenging journey: from working in his brother's brutish administration to trying to topple it in a U.S.-sanctioned coup, from escaping a death sentence for treason to becoming a mysterious leader of the insurgency and, by the end of the second season, forging an uneasy alliance with his brother to protect the country from religious extremists.

"The lesson, obviously, is that he really should have caught that flight home when he had the chance," Rayner jokes.

The second season ended with Jamal lying in a bloody mess on the palace floor, felled by a hail of bullets from an assassin within his own family in the show's final moment, his fate uncertain. The reins of power have passed to Bassam, its most vocal advocate for more democratic rule.

"The journey has been Barry's rediscovery of Bassam," says the 38-year-old British-accented actor, whose parentage—British father, American mother—means he carries dual citizenship. "He was very much Barry in that first season, but he rediscovered Bassam. In the second season, he was cast into the desert...He's returned to his birth country and to his original identity."

Rayner had a beard in Season 1, but he grew it in thicker during the show's second season. "When you're playing a president or a dictator, it's a time-honored cliché that a beard bestows authority on a man—or that's my hope, anyway," says Rayner. "People on the show have started calling me Abe Lincoln, which is an interesting comparison. I'm not quite sure if it's a compliment or not."

As Shakespeare wrote, "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." Jamal had his own take on that adage in the pilot, telling Bassam: "It's not easy being the son of a king."

That struggle for power—and the use of power once you have it—has been the focus of "Tyrant" since its inception. The show's creators and producers wanted to use the setting to explore those ideas, touching on the issues in the headlines while refraining from commenting on the policies and politics of any specific country.

"The Middle East is so complex that it's hard to get the right point of view without stirring up somebody," says Gwyneth Horder-Payton, the series' co-executive producer, who has also directed multiple episodes. "You can't please everybody, as we've found out. Because what's happening in the world now is so complex and dangerous, there will always be an opinion of which portrayal is the correct one."

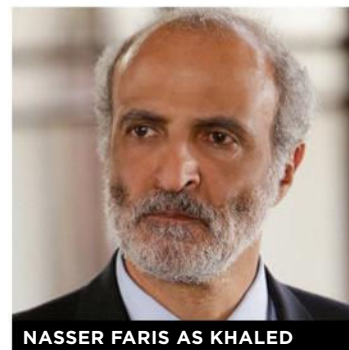
"We have five cultural advisers in Los Angeles and one on the set here in Budapest. And they're often in conflict with each other. So we're



MORAN ATIAS AS LEILA AND ADAM RAYNER AS BASSAM



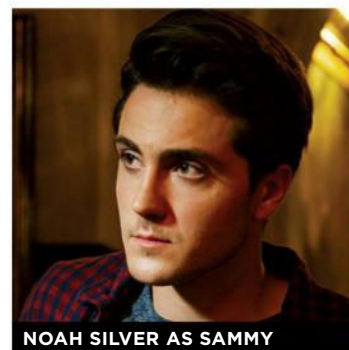
ASHRAF BARHOM AS JAMAL



NASSER FARIS AS KHALED



JENNIFER FINNIGAN AS MOLLY



NOAH SILVER AS SAMMY

The Al-Fayeeds

The Al-Fayeed family has ruled Abuddin for generations, but their power and wealth come with a price. All is not quiet inside the opulent palace they call home. Spoilers follow.

Bassam (*Adam Rayner*)

Life isn't always easy for the son of a king. When "Tyrant" begins, we meet Bassam, a pediatrician living in Los Angeles under the new name Barry. He hasn't been home for 20 years, and wants no part of the wealth and opulence enjoyed by his father, Khaled, the absolute ruler of the oil-rich country of Abuddin. Bassam reluctantly returns to the country of his birth to attend the wedding of his nephew, but the death of his father leads him to stay longer than he anticipated. Bassam is soon caught up in a new dream of changing his country for the better, but those lofty ideals find him at odds with his brother, the nation's new ruler, which nearly costs him his life.

Jamal (*Ashraf Barhom*)

Bassam's elder brother becomes president, and quickly proves even crueler than his father. He survives an American-backed coup led by his brother, but his savage treatment of his daughter-in-law leads her to strike him down in a hail of bullets. His fate is unknown.

Leila (*Moran Atias*)

In her own right, the wife of Jamal Al-Fayeed is a savvy politician, adept at steering her ruler husband into policy changes that suit her will. Her dealings with brother-in-law Bassam are complicated, in no small part due to their romance of 20 years ago.

Khaled (*Nasser Faris*)

During his long reign, Khaled was the uncompromising master of Abuddin. Showing no mercy to his enemies, he once ordered a poison gas attack that slayed 20,000 of his countrymen. He groomed his eldest son Jamal to follow in his footsteps, but on his deathbed he realized he had made a mistake, and told his younger son Bassam he should rule instead of his brother. His death leads to turmoil for the Al-Fayeed family and the nation of Abuddin alike.

Sammy (*Noah Silver*)

Bassam's son is at odds with his father when the series begins, but finds himself drawn closer to his dad as they fight side by side against terrorists aimed at destroying Abuddin.

Molly (*Jennifer Finnigan*)

Bassam's wife finds her life undone when a short visit to the Middle East turns into a high-level commitment. She tries to shelter her teenaged children from the chaos of the no-holds-barred world of her husband's past.

Ahmed (*Cameron Gharaee*)

Jamal's son lacks his father's taste for a good fight and struggles to find his way in the government. The surprise entrance of his half-brother Rami Said (Keon Alexander), a valiant soldier, makes things no easier.

Nusrat (*Sibylla Deen*)

The woman who would be princess of Abuddin is brutally attacked on her wedding night by Jamal, her future father-in-law. The secret she keeps from her husband Ahmed tortures her, until she unleashes revenge in an act that leaves the future of Jamal—and herself—uncertain.

—David Savona

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all learning and trying to understand. We run into challenges all the time that expose our own ignorance.”

She pointed to a moment in an early episode: Barry enters a mosque during prayers, walks into the center of the congregation and speaks to someone who is in the midst of worship. Horder-Payton found herself in the middle of momentary controversy.

“We built the set and hired extras of Arab descent. When Barry walked into the middle of the service, they were upset because they said this would never happen in a mosque—it would never be allowed,” she recalls. “Plus here I am, a woman, in the mosque. Also not allowed. And I’m wearing shoes, because I’m going back and forth outside, where Video Village [where cameramen and directors watch the scene as it is filmed] is. Also not allowed. And they were serious, even though it was a set we’d built and not a real mosque. These kinds of things are a daily occurrence.”

The fictional nature of Abuddin doesn’t mask the way art is mirroring real life. The echoes of Syrian turmoil under Bashar al-Assad get stronger in the upcoming season for Bassam Al-Fayeed—and things don’t seem to bode well for Bassam.

Gordon says, “As we were developing the series, it was interesting to us to consider the morning after the Syrian Civil War started and to imagine Assad and his wife, looking at each other and saying, ‘How did we get here from our nice home in Hyde Park?’ He was an ophthalmologist in London. But it’s also interesting to think about this: How does an aspirational leader become a person everyone thinks of as a monster, except through the exercise of power?”

“The parallels to Assad are obvious,” says Rayner. “The old-style dictator father, the son who’s been trained in the West. Still, it’s important to say that this isn’t a show about one country. That would prevent us from dealing with issues that are more common region-wide.”

In “Tyrant,” Jamal reflects the titular approach to governance. Bassam, a physician, has tried to present humane, humanitarian alternatives to his brother. But, Rayner hints, wanting to do the right thing and being able to actually do it can get tricky when you’re the one in charge.

“The show was pitched to me as: A guy who’s been running from his

“You see a darkness descend on someone in a position of power... How do you rule over a democracy when you’ve got a gun to your head?”

—ADAM RAYNER

destiny comes back to face that destiny, by ruling the country he left behind,” Rayner says. “I like to see Barry tested, and he will be. There are some heavy things happening that will shake him to his core and make him question his principles.

“Guys come into these situations with huge ideals. A tenuous security situation can force them to move away from those ideals because the country is not stable enough for fully free elections. The difficulty of having democracy without stability is a bit of a chicken-and-egg thing, isn’t it? With Bassam, his theoretically more-progressive views turn out



In a series dedicated to power, no couple wields more than Leila (played by Moran Atias) and Jamal Al-Fayeed (portrayed by Ashraf Barhom).

not to stand the tests thrown at him.

“You see a darkness descend on someone in a position of power, when they realize their enemies aren’t playing by the rules. And they come to the conclusion that it’s us or them.”

This is Rayner’s biggest role yet in a career that has taken him from the stage and TV screen in Great Britain to the starring role in an American cable-network drama. Not bad for a guy who says he started acting “for laughs.”

“I was at university, at a moment in my life when I thought I wanted to have a go at something I enjoyed, before I came to my senses and had to get a real job,” explains Rayner, who balances the call of family with the duty of work by living with his wife Lucy and toddler son Jack in an apartment in Budapest near the Danube while the show is in production.

He plunged into acting after college, earning a series of small roles in television and theater in London. “I had some great jobs early on, but you have to string them together to actually make a living. There tended to be big gaps at first but, by my late 20s, I relatively regularly got TV work in the U.K. I thought, well, I can pay the rent—and there are still 10 rungs up the ladder.”

Rayner marvels at his own introduction to Hollywood. “I was just another actor getting off a plane in L.A. on January 6, 2010—and I was a regular on a TV show three weeks later. It’s the only town in the world where that could happen.”

The TV show was the three-season long TNT series, “Hawthorne,” where he played a doctor opposite Jada Pinkett Smith. Al-Fayeed is the third doctor Rayner has played in his last four roles. “As I like to say, I’m not a doctor but I play one on TV,” he jokes. “I can use that line in any emergency.”



Cigar lover Howard Gordon, who developed “Tyrant,” has a long track record of dramatic hits, including “24” and “Homeland.”

Acting brought Rayner to cigars. He had a small role in a production of Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing* in London that was set in pre-revolutionary Cuba. “The production bought us the cheapest cigars; they literally were falling apart in our hands while we were smoking them onstage,” Rayner says. “They were revolting.” Salvation came from a fellow actor named Joe Nelson, who brought in Cuban cigars. “He decided that as long as we were going to be smoking, we might as well enjoy ourselves.... That may have been the most heavy cigar-smoking period of my life. Every night, I came in looking forward to that scene. There would be 600 people in the audience and these three guys in half-light, smoking cigars and listening to music.”

Rayner tends to indulge in fine tobacco during evenings out in London with old friends. “We’re spread all over the world, but we get together when we can. We’ll put on suits and go to a nice restaurant and drink reasonably powerful spirits—and then the cigars will come out. My father and I will occasionally have a cigar together.”

Rayner’s tastes tend toward the traditional in Cubans: “I normally go straight to the Montecristos, the Romeo y Julieta,” he says.

During one of the rare scenes of brotherly affection between Jamal and Barry in the first season of “Tyrant,” the cigars came out. The cigars smoked in “Tyrant” inevitably carry a certain symbolism, given the context: “They’re considered quite a Western symbol, associated with power and wealth, smoked by the Tony Sopranos of the world,” says Rayner.

Casting Rayner as the Arab-born Barry/Bassam came “after a long process,” Gordon says. “He needed to be someone who could be a TV star, who could hold a series. Adam hadn’t done much but he had a strength—and women respond to him palpably on-screen, which is a good thing.”

“Adam is an English gentleman and very charming. I have a lot of vulnerable scenes with him and he makes me feel very safe,” says Moran Atias, the dark-eyed former model who plays Jamal’s politically astute wife Leila—and Bassam’s love interest from long ago. “Most of my scenes with him are emotionally intense, very full in that sense. I keep that emotion

compressed and either let it out just before or immediately after a take. It feels good to find him there at the end of a scene like that, to hold on and tell me the work is good. It makes me feel safe. I trust him.”

Atias takes an immersive approach to acting. When tasked with playing a gypsy, she moved to Rome and lived like a gypsy for three months prior to the shoot. But, as an Israeli Jew cast as the wife of an Arab dictator, she was even more determined to get inside the role. She read books by and about powerful women—everyone from Queen Noor to Hillary Clinton—to understand both the surface and the substance of that life. She also studied the Koran (“That’s the first textbook of the culture,”) and took horseback-riding lessons. “It’s a process that never ends,” she says of researching her role.

“These living characters feed my choices in creating the character of Leila,” she says. “It takes time to build layers. Once you have those layers, you can create contradictions in the character that make her more interesting than a one-dimensional portrayal.”

As a peace activist in Israel, Atias also understands the importance of a show like “Tyrant” in opening channels of communication. “To me, this matters. It’s an incredible opportunity to work with Arab artists. Through art, walls fall.”

Atias brings a laser-like intensity to the role, her stunning smile giving way to an expression reflecting the seriousness of the idea at the center of the only drama on television that confronts the day-to-day existential question of living in the Middle East.

“How do you trust your enemy, someone you know wants you dead?” she asks. “These questions—they’re really embedded in this season.”

Barhom, who plays Jamal, broke into American film in 2007’s *The Kingdom*, and personifies the complexity the show seeks to explore. Israeli-born, he went to Haifa University. A Christian Arab, he is barred from entering Saudi Arabia because he has an Israeli passport.

“To me, this matters. It’s an incredible opportunity. Through art, walls fall.”

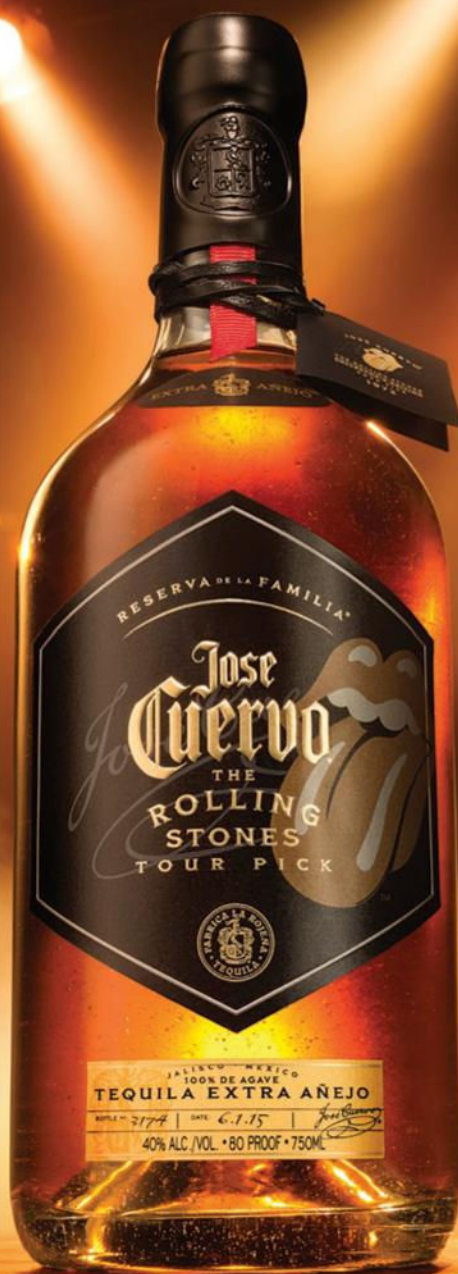
—MORAN ATIAS

But, as he once told Denver’s *Westword* weekly, “Art is the place where people can meet as individuals and come together. When we attach ourselves to national identities, then we enter into a cycle of conflict. I didn’t choose where I was born or who to be or what people would call me. I’m a hybrid, from a cultural perspective, but I don’t think in these terms. I’m more simple than that. I’m a mammal who will live 70 years, more or less, who believes in God and likes his life.”

Unlike Atias and Barhom, Rayner is from the West, not the Middle East. “Obviously it’s a challenge for someone with no experience of the Middle East to play someone from there,” says Gordon. “Adam has been up to it.”

“My main research was reading about the region,” explains Rayner. “I’m not playing someone who was fully culturally an Arab man—to him, this world had become alien. Still, I was learning about Bedouin and Arab culture, the history and politics, as well as the current political climate, trying to gain an understanding and knowledge that Bassam would have grown up with.”

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Rayner has a general understanding of where the Season 3 plot will take his character as he assumes the presidency of Abuddin. But he's reluctant to look too far ahead.

"Part of the fun is to be surprised as you go along," he says. "Others are keener to know the long arc than I am. I think there's a benefit in not knowing. The character doesn't know. So I don't want to fill my head with where we're going next. It doesn't serve any purpose to know the endgame when you're at Episode 1, trying to discover your character."

At this point, that character has had power thrust upon him by events beyond his control. How will Bassam react to even a temporary dose of its seductive effects? "What's the saying?" asks Rayner with a smile. "Power corrupts?"

If outside forces eventually push Bassam Al-Fayed to exercise dictatorial power to maintain order, can he somehow keep his ideals intact? As Rayner points out, history suggests otherwise.

"How do you rule over a democracy when you've got a gun to your

head?" he says. "One easy way to solve the problem is to get a gun to the other guy's head. It solves the problem—but it's not democracy...How do you create security for the country without compromising those democratic principles? Democracy requires a lot of preparation, with elections after you've educated the people. But how long will that take? And who's in charge in the meantime? It's not as simple as, well, we got rid of Hussein or Qaddafi and now we'll have democracy.

"Because to build the democratic process, first you have to delay the democratic process—and that's an authoritarian government," he says.

Rayner's words echo through the vast splendor of the fictional opulence of his character's palace as he ponders these thoughts, his words hanging heavy in the air. "We want it to be better, but how long are we willing to wait? Those are all tough questions—aren't they?" ❖

Contributing editor Marshall Fine is critic-in-residence at The Picture House Regional Film Center in Pelham, New York.



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Cuba's Classic Car Détente

Cuba's wealth of antique autos is not only a tourist draw, but a symbol of the people's resiliency and the country's socioeconomic transformation.

BY PETER KORNBLUH





DOUGLAS STEAKLEY/GETTY IMAGES

RAY MAGLIOZZI is sitting on a stoop of the Hotel Capri in Havana—the last hotel built by mafia don Meyer Lansky before the Cuban revolution—with about six minutes left on a Romeo y Julieta he is smoking. A replica Ford Model T taxi pulls up to drop off passengers. Magliozi, who is arguably the most renowned auto mechanic in the United States, engages the young female driver, Yemey, in an animated discussion of the creative repairs she has made, and all the parts she needs but can't get, to keep the car on the road. She pops the hood to show him how she replaced a broken generator on the transplanted VW engine that powers her car. "Her original generator had given out," Magliozi explains. "So without a ready replacement the mechanic welded a bracket to the failed unit and retrofitted the charging system with a General Motors alternator which got bolted to that bracket. Pretty clever!"

The now retired cohost of “Car Talk,” the wildly popular program on National Public Radio, has come to Havana to meet the mechanics, owners and drivers who are responsible for the automotive oasis of classic American cars that populate the streets of Cuba. “We are trying to ascertain how these cars stay on the road,” as Magliozzi describes his mission. The 1930s-, ’40s- and ’50s-era Studebakers, Hudsons, Chrysler Crown Imperials, Buick Century Rivas, Chevy Bel Airs and Styleline Deluxes, Ford Edsels and Fairlanes, among so many other long-extinct Detroit models, are alive and well in Cuba. These so-called “yank tanks” have long been a ubiquitous part of Cuba’s national landscape and cultural identity—and are now emerging as a critical component of the nation’s steady evolution away from strict socialism toward a mixed market economy.

For car aficionados such as Ray Magliozzi and the small team of “Car Talk” producers and writers who have accompanied him to Cuba, watch-



Ray Magliozzi of NPR’s “Car Talk” (left) teamed up and traded T-shirts with master mechanic Julio Álvarez, of NostalgiCar, on his recent visit.

ing these classic automobiles traverse Havana is a trip down memory lane. In Cuba he has had the chance to hop behind the wheel of a 1929 Ford Model A, tootle around town in a ’59 Buick Special, and tune the engine of a 1958 Chevrolet Impala. During visits to restoration garages and auto shops Magliozzi compared notes with fellow Cuban mechanics on make-shift clutches, jerry-rigged exhaust manifolds, front-end alignments, master cylinders and bell cranks—all repaired without access to original parts or modern machinery. “I’ve been constantly impressed by the cleverness and the sheer determination of the people who keep these cars going,” he marvels. “It’s amazing.”

The president of the United States shares his opinion. During Barack Obama’s history-making trip to Havana last March, he also highlighted the resourceful, entrepreneurial spirit of the Cuban car community. “Here in Havana, we see that same talent in *cuentapropistas* [small business entrepreneurs]...and old cars that still run,” he said during his speech to the Cuban nation. “*El Cubano inventa del aire*,” the president declared, switching to Spanish for emphasis. Cubans invent things out of thin air.

CUBAN CACHARROS

When it comes to their *cacharros*, as the older autos are affectionately referred to, inventive Cubans have made a virtue out of necessity. Newer cars are simply not available to the vast majority of Cuban drivers—even though Raúl Castro announced in 2013 that as part of his economic modernization plan Cubans would finally be free to purchase new cars. When the few state-owned dealerships opened in January 2014, potential customers suffered severe sticker shock: \$262,000 for a Peugeot 508—a car with a MSRP of about \$30,000 in the United States. Cuban government markups on such used cars as a 2010 VW Jetta, which went for more than \$50,000, were also prohibitively exorbitant. “The Communist Party doesn’t want Cubans to be able to drive around in new cars because they are status symbols,” one chauffeur explained to Magliozzi and his team during a city tour—in a 1950 Ford—on their first night in Havana.

With no realistic ability to purchase a new car and limited access to affordable used cars that actually run, Cubans need practical alternatives to keeping the old cars on the road for as long as possible—60, 70, even 100 years. “Cubans and their cars are like a marriage,” observes my Cuban friend, Edel. “Till death do us part.”

An estimated 60,000 American-made cars are on the island—almost all of them dating back to the early and mid-20th century heyday of the big three Detroit automakers. “The narrow old streets are jammed with big American automobiles,” *The Nation* magazine reported in January 1928 when President Calvin Coolidge became the first, and, until Obama, the last U.S. president to visit the island. By the 1940s and ’50s when Cuba had become a playground for the American rich and famous, as well as the U.S. mafia, the country also became a national showroom for shiny, new, Detroit-manufactured automobiles. Ford, Chrysler, Chevrolet and Cadillac dealerships lined Havana’s leafy Prado boulevard. Indeed, Cuba gained the dubious distinction of importing more Caddys—Fleetwood convertibles, DeVilles, Eldorado Broughams—than any other nation in the world.

The 1959 Cuban revolution put a dramatic end to the ostentatious, chrome-plated display of wealth on the island. In constructing a new Cuba society, Fidel Castro made it clear that his revolutionary regime would focus on agricultural development and socialist egalitarianism. “We need tractors, not Cadillacs,” Fidel famously declared. The car dealerships were expropriated, along with other private enterprises. Many members of the Cuban bourgeoisie fled to the United States, leaving businesses, mansions and their cars behind.

President John F. Kennedy’s imposition of a full trade embargo in early 1962 deprived Cuba of its natural trading partner. The *bloqueo*, as Cubans call it, created a crisis for the economy, and opened the door to a long era of Soviet economic assistance—as well as the importing of Eastern Bloc cars such as Ladas, Polskis, Volgas and Moscovitches. No American-made cars have come to Cuba since. Nor, until very recently, were any replacement auto parts available.

Initially, as Magliozzi points out, the Cubans had spare parts on the island. After those were used up, he says, Cuban mechanics cannibalized other American cars that were there “and when they ran out of what could be scavenged, they ran into ingenuity.” For years, Cubans have molded and manufactured car parts by hand, using sheet metals, re-melted iron and plastic, even wood. What they couldn’t make, they would modify. Car owners with resources might restore the body of a vintage

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Makeshift clutches, jerry-rigged exhaust manifolds and bell cranks all testify to the cleverness and the sheer determination of the people.

Buick Roadmaster, Olds Deluxe 88, Chevy Bel Air or Cadillac Fleetwood to outward perfection, but underneath the hood would be a transplanted diesel engine from a small Eastern European truck or one of the Japanese or Korean cars Cuba has imported over the years. (One particularly enterprising mechanic, Jote Madera, managed to salvage the motor of a confiscated drug runner's cigar boat and retrofit it into his 1951 Chevrolet Business Coup, known to Cuba's drag racing community as "the Black Widow.") Beyond the engine, almost every old American car moves on parts from a variety of other newer foreign vehicles. Innovative mechanics have managed to create what Cuban journalist José Raúl Concepción calls "Fordyotas" and other kinds of "functional automotive Frankensteins" that are now a major component of Cuba's socioeconomic environment and cultural heritage.

AUTOMOTIVE AMBASSADORS

Many of the unrestored old cars that rumble up and down Havana's streets are indeed metal monsters—unsafe, falling apart and spewing exhaust. The *almendrones*, as Cubans call the taxis which circle in a fixed loop through the city, are uncomfortable, potentially dangerous and, according to a recent investigative report on the website *Cubadebate*, increasingly expensive for the majority of citizens who still garner a state wage of about \$22 a month. Many Cubans outside the tourist sector see the cars as a symbol of the decrepit state-run system of inadequate and antiquated public transportation. There is no nostalgia for the old cars. Rather their omnipresence on the roads is a clear reflection of Cuba's abject failure to modernize. If given the chance, observes Magliozzi, Cubans "would lunge at the chance to own a new car."

For tourists, however, the result of Cuba's automotive ingenuity is a unique parade of mobile Americana—a moving exhibition of Detroit-styled steel on wheels. "Cuba is by far the largest American car museum in the world," writes photojournalist and tour guide Christopher Baker in his glossy photography book, *Cuba Classics*. "There is no more singularly Cuban image than a voluptuous yank-tank of yesteryear basking in the tropical sunlight."

Indeed, along with cigars, rum, salsa music, and a curiosity about the Cuban revolution itself, the vintage cars have become a leading tourist attraction. Since December 2014, when Presidents Obama and Castro announced a breakthrough in relations, the number of U.S. travelers has increased by 93 percent. Direct flights on such airlines as United, Jet Blue and American Airlines are due to begin later this year, when some 450,000 Americans are expected to join the 3 million visitors to Cuba from other nations. Many of them will take a joy ride in one or more of the classic autos. "The trip doesn't feel complete unless you climb into one of these cars," Baker noted in an interview with *CIGAR AFICIONADO*. "It would be like going to Paris without climbing the Eiffel Tower."

While Cuba's tourism boom is creating shortages of everything from hotel rooms to beer, the influx of visitors is generating revenues and incentives for the car's owners and drivers. More and more meticulously restored cars are appearing on the roads—especially convertibles, which command premium fares as cars-for-hire and taxis. And more and more drivers are obtaining government approval to become self-employed chauffeurs, expanding Cuba's small but growing private sector. The story of the cars, suggests Collin Laverty, who runs Cuban Educational Travel and has recently purchased a beautifully restored, two-tone, 1938 Ford



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Indeed, each car, and each driver, has a special story relating to Cuba’s complicated history and its current socioeconomic transformation—stories that are often shared with passengers. Beyond offering transportation opportunities, both the cars and the drivers have become essential cultural ambassadors as they provide a positive point of contact—and common ground—between foreigners and Cubans. “It isn’t just a pursuit of a career and money,” as Magliozzi observes about the people in the car community he has met in Cuba. “They really love their cars.” That love is shared by many of the tourists who hop in for a ride.



Magliozzi tunes up a 1958 Chevy Impala with NostalgicCar mechanics (top). Reiby, a Havana chauffeur, guides a tourist in his Model T Ford.

One of the first owner/drivers Magliozzi meets on his trip is Ramón Gonzalez, a 70-year-old Cuban from the province of Santa Clara. Gonzalez is the proud owner of a red 1929 Ford Model A—it still has its original motor—which he bought in the mid 1990s for about \$600 and restored himself, part-by-part, over the course of a decade. A former professor of mechanics, Gonzalez drove the car across the country to Havana several years ago to take advantage of Raúl Castro’s economic reforms, which opened the door

to private sector taxi drivers. He now ferries tourists up and down the Malecón, the seaside boulevard that separates the city from the ocean.

For the “Car Talk” team, he has assembled the unofficial “Ford Model T Club.” The group of cars includes another pristine 1929 Model A, owned by Nelys, a former doctor who abandoned a career in medicine in the state sector for the considerably higher income of a taxi driver in the new private sector. Her bright green Model A is joined by several other vintage models, including a 1914 Ford Model T, owned by Reiby, an older Cuban man who acquired the car during an inheritance conflict after the original owner passed away. A five-car caravan of very old Fords carries the “Car Talk” entourage to the outskirts of Havana where they can drive the cars themselves. When Gonzalez’s Model A hits a pothole and the engine cuts out, he jumps out, lifts the hood, and fiddles with the wiring. “The ignition coil wire popped off,” predicts Magliozzi, who became famous on “Car Talk,” along with his older brother Tom, for being able to identify and solve automotive problems on the radio without actually seeing them. “On this car it is easy to just pop it back on.”

NOSTALGIC CARS

For 25 years between 1987 and 2012, “Car Talk” was NPR’s most popular show. More than 4 million listeners tuned in every Saturday morning to hear Ray and Tom—they called themselves “Click and Clack, the Tappet brothers” on the show—field call-in questions about people and their cars. Through quick wit and sage advice, they would diagnose and solve the callers’ problems and concerns—even ones that had nothing to do with automobiles. The show was distinguished by the banter between the two Magliozzi brothers and by their peals of laughter—particularly Tom’s infectious guffaws. “It’s hard to remember any person whose laugh changed an entire industry,” observed Charlie Kravetz, the general manager of WBUR, the NPR affiliate in Boston where “Car Talk” got its start. “Everybody in public radio would tell you there’s a line in the sand: There was everything before ‘Car Talk’ and after ‘Car Talk.’ We all owe them an enormous debt.” The “Car Talk” duo “are culturally right up there with Mark Twain and the Marx Brothers,” said the program’s long time executive producer, Doug Berman, in a eulogy to Tom, who died of Alzheimer’s disease in November 2014. “They will stand the test of time.”

Led by Berman, the “Car Talk” team maintains a dynamic and popular website—cartalk.com—and counts some 600,000 followers on its Facebook page. In a tribute to Tom, the radio show has been renamed “The Best of Car Talk” and continues to be broadcast weekly on hundreds of NPR stations. Even in reruns it remains one of the highest-rated radio shows in the United States. “I sometimes listen to the show just to hear my brother’s voice,” Ray told me during the trip to Cuba. At age 67, he has recently stepped back from running the “Good News Garage” that he owned with his brother, handing off management to one of his lead auto mechanics.

In Cuba, Magliozzi finds an auto garage also owned by two brothers, Paul and Felix Gómez. The repair shop known as the “Casino” was opened by their father, Eliecer Gómez, and operated informally under the radar of the Cuban government for many years. With the recent legalization of independent, non-state-owned garages, it is doing a brisk business in front-end alignments and in repairing the Russian-built Ladas that many Cubans still drive. Paul Gómez shows the “Car Talk” team a Lada engine he is installing, and he and Ray engage in an animated discussion about the 5,000 clutch replacements Paul has done over the years—he

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keeps a handwritten logbook of every single repair—and his innovative efforts to construct a non-hydraulic clutch apparatus. The two climb down into the pit to examine the front-end alignment repairs on a beat-up Russian Volga.

But it is at one of Havana's preeminent restoration garages that Ray really gets grease on his hands. During a visit to NostalgCar, Magliozzi gets to work on a 1958 Chevy Impala in need of a tune-up, adjusting the valves so that the "tappets don't click and clack," as he explains. "We are going to do it again," Magliozzi tells Cuban master mechanic, Julio Álvarez, after one round of adjustments, as he attempts to further reduce the piston noise levels.

NostalgCar is a prime example of successful small-business entrepreneurship in Cuba's small but rapidly growing private sector. Álvarez and his wife, Nidialys Acosta, started the company in 2012, after a powder-blue 1956 Chevy Bel Air that Álvarez had meticulously restored won a casting contest for use in a Canadian film. Álvarez restores the vintage cars, mostly mid-1950s Bel Airs, and Acosta deploys them as a car-for-hire



The irony is that the Cuban embargo resulted in Havana becoming a rolling museum extolling the excess of American car design of the 1950s.

service in the tourist sector. They now employ eight young mechanics, and generate revenue for at least two dozen drivers. In less than five years, their fleet has gone from two to 22 cars, several of which have become quite famous. Ray gets to tour around Havana in Acosta's pink and white 1956 Bel Air, nicknamed "Lola"—the same car that Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe drove in last fall when he visited Cuba, and that New York Governor Andrew Cuomo rode in when he came last year. When Secretary of State John Kerry came to Havana on August 14, 2015, to reopen the U.S. Embassy, the State Department asked Álvarez to finish restoring a black 1959 Impala sedan so Kerry could take it for a spin. During the Embassy flag-raising ceremony, the NostalgCar Impala was positioned on the street behind the flagpole for the world to see.

During his afternoon at NostalgCar, Magliozzi inspects the rare 1959 Chevrolet Impala convertible that Álvarez has recently purchased to restore. There are only three of them on the island, he tells the "Car Talk" team, explaining the high price he paid. He has already acquired most of the parts to restore the car, paying a 20 percent premium to a middle man in the

United States to purchase the parts and arrange for them to be carried to Havana. "Everybody wants to ride in a convertible," he says. "And that's the cost of doing this business while the embargo is still in place."

THE CARS AND THE EMBARGO

When President Obama visited Cuba last March—the first U.S. president to do so in 88 years—he hosted a special forum for Cuban entrepreneurs. Julio Álvarez and Nidialys Acosta were invited to attend. They were also among more than 500 dignitaries invited to the venerable Gran Teatro the next day where Obama gave a major speech to President Castro and the Cuban people. "As president of the United States, I've called on our Congress to lift the embargo," Obama said, to a round of applause. "It is an outdated burden on the Cuban people."

Certainly Julio and Nidialys are looking forward to the day when the embargo is lifted, and they can order parts directly from the United States without using a middleman—or even better, buy them from a U.S. auto parts wholesaler in Havana. "For my business, if Obama ends the embargo that would be the best," says Nidialys. "It means more American tourists to rent our cars, more facility to bring in the parts, and to maintain and restore more cars."

Magliozzi agrees. "The embargo doesn't make any sense," he states. "There is no good reason to punish the Cuban people" and lifting it would "help Cuba lift its standard of living." Magliozzi looks forward to the day when U.S. auto parts companies will be able to set up a small factory in Havana, employ Cuban workers and make parts that all the mechanics he has met on his trip can use to advance their repair and restoration businesses, and continue to keep the old classic cars on the road.

With the Republican leadership in Congress dedicated to blocking President Obama's agenda, especially during an election year, it is unlikely the full embargo will be lifted anytime soon. But Obama has been able to use his executive powers to open the door to greater commercial and cultural interaction with Cuba, bringing a lot of attention to the vintage American automobiles. A recent segment of Anthony Bourdain's CNN show, "Parts Unknown," featured the old cars in Cuba. This past spring, the Havana Motor Club, a documentary film about current efforts to legalize the sport of drag racing in Cuba, premiered in New York City. And in April the popular movie franchise *Fast and Furious* became the first major Hollywood production to film in Cuba, casting more than 80 of Cuba's coolest and fastest restored yank-tanks as extras for its forthcoming sequel, *Fast and Furious 8*.

In the meantime, U.S. tourists will continue to come to Cuba in droves, many of them hoping for an experience of climbing into the back seat of a vintage Bel Air like Nidialys Acosta's Lola or Ramón Gonzalez's 1929 Model A. "We feel good that the Americans are coming here," Gonzalez told CIGAR AFICIONADO. "We have wanted this for years. We hope that relations continue to improve, that our economy improves and that the little we have we can share." Indeed, when Magliozzi and his "Car Talk" team ran into Gonzalez while exploring Old Havana, he spontaneously invited them into his small apartment for coffee. Magliozzi is now "a friend," Gonzalez says. "I feel happy that this guy drove my car." ♦

Peter Kornbluh writes frequently for CIGAR AFICIONADO on Cuba. He is co-author, with William M. LeoGrande, of *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations Between Washington and Havana*.



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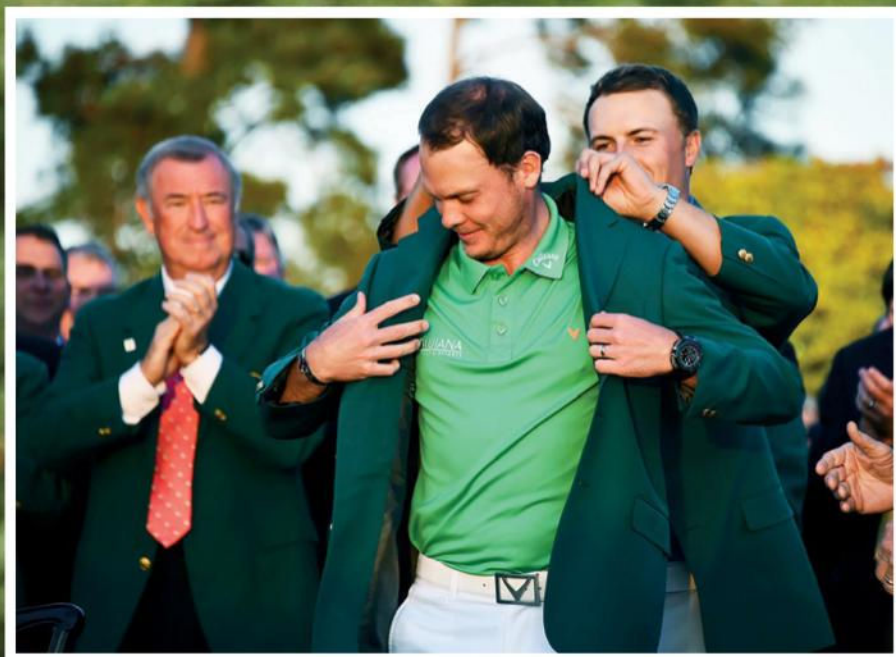
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Europe's Masters

Danny Willett's surprise Masters victory is a reminder of the long-term success European Tour players have had on the biggest stage in golf

BY JEFF WILLIAMS



Danny Willett won the Masters with a showcase five-birdie, bogey-free final round, earning him the green jacket. Willett's win is one of many in the U.S. by European Tour players.

DANNY WILLETT, son of an English vicar and a Swedish mother, is now the owner of a decidedly unfashionable and immensely desirable green jacket.

With a brilliant final round of 67 at Augusta National on April 10—where he carded five birdies and zero bogeys—Willett won the Masters and with it the green blazer that symbolizes excellence at the very top of the game.

Willett's profile may have been low in America prior to his victory, and few viewers anticipated he would emerge victorious, especially after the strong start by American superstar Jordan Spieth. But Willett's win should not come as a surprise. It marked the fifth time in 10 years that the green jacket was draped over the shoulders of a player from outside the United States. Willett is one of many players to forge his game in the crucible of the European Tour and to have that success translate into victories on the grand stage of the PGA Tour. His five-under par Augusta triumph is yet another reminder of the strength and depth of the European Tour.

Willett's victory at the Masters was the 50th major win by a European Tour player since 1979, according to European Tour calculations. The European Tour is tough on players and fosters a tough-minded mentality. That mindset is one of the primary reasons Europe's team has won five of the last six Ryder Cup competitions. In high-pressure situations, European Tour players seem to buckle down and play their best.

"First of all it's a great tour, second of all it's a lot more difficult to play than the United States," says Butch Harmon, the noted golf instructor who has also commentated for European Tour television. "In the United States everybody has it too easy. All the courses are in perfect condition, the practice facilities are good, the weather is much better, you travel in one country."

The tougher conditions of the European Tour help its players mesh and help each other out when things get difficult, according to Harmon. "I think that creates a very good bond of the players

SCOTT HALLERAN/GETTY IMAGES FOR GOLFWEEK; INSET: JIM WATSON/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Willett was all smiles after his victory. The 28-year-old champion—and new father—would have missed the Masters if his wife had gone to term; baby Zachariah was born on March 30.

and that's one of the reasons of the success of the Europeans in the Ryder Cup," he says. "The guys on the European Tour eat in the same restaurants, drink in the same bars, they travel together, seem to spend more time together. We don't quite see that on the U.S. tour where guys are more individual. Most of the guys fly private jets, don't go to dinner."

There is no shortage of star performers on the PGA Tour who proved themselves first on the European Tour. You have Rory McIlroy ascending to No. 1 in the world and winning four majors—a U.S. Open, a British Open and two PGAs. Fellow North Irishmen Graeme McDowell won the 2010 U.S. Open and Darren Clarke won the 2011 British Open. Englishman Justin Rose won the 2013 U.S. Open. Four-time major winner Ernie Els has been joined on the major winning roster by fellow South Africans Louie Oosthuizen and Charl Schwartzel who have won one each.

Going back a little farther, you have England's Nick Faldo, who won six majors and spent 97 weeks ranked as the No. 1 golfer in the world. Spaniard José María Olazábal and the German Bernhard Langer won two Masters each. Scot Sandy Lyle and the Welshman Ian Woosnam each won one. Lyle also won a British Open. The Australian Adam Scott was the 2013 Masters winner. South African Nick Price won two PGA Championships and a British Open. Australian Greg Norman won two British Opens. All of them have spent time on the European Tour.

The true beginning of this European trend of brilliance was sparked by the sensational career of Seve Ballesteros, the dashing Spaniard who won five major championships. The European Tour was officially established in 1972, and Ballesteros was its shining light, bagging his first major at the 1979 British Open.

Willett is one of many to forge his game in the crucible of the European Tour, and to have that success translate into victories on the PGA Tour.

"Seve was really the forbearer in many ways," says Els. "Just a windfall of great players coming through. [Ballesteros] just inspired a whole generation of players."

You could say that three golfing generations later, Danny Willett was being carried by the spirit of Seve Ballesteros.

It wasn't as if Willett was a complete dark horse at Augusta, even if his accomplishments were somewhere in the background of the American golf psyche. He won the English Amateur championship in 2007, attended Jacksonville State University in America and became the No. 1 ranked amateur in the world. He turned pro in 2008, qualified for the European Tour and won five events there. He made brief forays onto the PGA Tour, finishing third at the 2015 WGC-Cadillac Match Play and 38th at the 2015 Masters. By the start of 2016 he was in the top 20 in the world. After the Masters victory, he was No. 9.

"Danny Willett has been a good player for a while," says Harmon. "Americans weren't used to seeing him until he played so well at the Masters. But he's played well in big tournaments over here, won in Europe. He plays with a tremendous amount

of confidence. I like that about him. He handled the pressure of the situation at Augusta beautifully. I don't think Danny is getting the credit for playing as well as he did and handling the situation. I think you are going to see him contend in the majors in the future. He's got a tremendous amount of confidence in his ability, some would say cocky, but you have to have that to succeed in this game."

Cocky, yes. But also grounded. The youngest of four brothers growing up in the English city of Sheffield, England, the 28-year-old Willett was never allowed to outgrow his britches.

"My dad, as you'd expect, is pretty philosophical and my mum, being Swedish, is more straightforward and blunt," Willett said after he won the Masters. "I've had times when I've wanted an arm round my shoulder and I've been given a kick up the backside instead. Which is how it should be."

But he is allowed to exceed everyone's expectations. He's got a certain one-off swing, one that wouldn't necessarily be copied but one that works for him. And one that was honed during this travels on the European Tour.

"The European Tour is a wonderful tour to travel if you want to learn about life," says Els, who at 46 still plays both a PGA Tour and European Tour schedule. "You just adapt. Golf is all about adapting. When you make a double bogey on the first, you have to adapt your game plan. If you get a cold wind, you have to adapt your game to that. You are more out there, exposed to different types of elements, different types of situations on the European Tour."

"You learn a lot more about yourself and your game traveling so much. You can imagine going through passport control all the time. The percentage

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ADAM SCOTT, AUSTRALIA



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TREVOR IMMELMAN, SOUTH AFRICA



of your trip not quite working out 100 percent the way the travel agent has it planned is quite high on the European Tour. You have to adapt.”

Els once encountered a situation of cuisine that required him to adapt in an unusual way. “There was one situation in Beijing many years ago where we stayed at a place where they had authentic Chinese food and my stomach doesn’t go well with that,” says Els. “So I had a chef, who couldn’t speak English very well, prepare me spaghetti Bolognese for breakfast, lunch and dinner for a week....It toughens you up a bit, so that’s why I think [European] players are not afraid of winning over here. They feel conditions here are much better for them to play good golf.”

After the Masters Willett accepted PGA Tour membership, and you can expect him to become a fixture on this tour soon. The PGA Tour is the regular port of call for many European Tour players who now base themselves in the United States—McIlroy, McDowell, Scott, Els, Rose, Schwartzel and Oosthuizen all have homes in America, along with many other European stalwarts like Paul Casey, Henrik Stenson and Luke Donald.

“If you want to make life easier on yourself, you come to America to play,” says Faldo, who has 30 wins on the European Tour plus nine PGA Tour wins, six of them his majors. “My goal was always about getting home on Sunday night, run as fast as you could to the airport so you could be a dad for a couple of days. In America it’s so much easier: no passports, [so much] prize money there’s private planes. I did alright in America, but I didn’t play that much and I lived out of a suitcase here rather than moving here. I didn’t win all that much here, but if I’d come here and lived here, might have been a different story.”

That said, Faldo wouldn’t trade his past, where he played primarily on the European Tour and made sorties to the States for stretches at a time.

“The European Tour has really, really grown,” says Faldo. “Way back when Seve and I were doing it, the prize money was a third the size of the American tour. But I think players like to support the European Tour because if you like traveling—which you have to do—you go to far more diverse places on the European Tour. The American tour is easier to play, but the European Tour is probably more interesting. You play in national cities. You fly to major cities across Europe, the Middle East, China, Southeast Asia.”

That journey, says Harmon, makes a golfer mentally stronger.

“I recommended [playing the European Tour] to Adam Scott years ago, thought it would be a better test for him to test himself on different kinds of courses, different countries, different weather conditions, different travel conditions. It worked out great for Adam,” says Harmon. “I recommended it to Peter Uihlein, Brooks Koepka.”

At the outset of his PGA Tour career, Willett is likely to be a commuter, juggling European PGA Tour events and continuing to live in Rotherdam, England, with his wife Nicole and new infant son Zachariah. If not for Zachariah’s early arrival on March 30, Willett would not have even played in the Masters. If his wife had gone to term—April 11, the Monday after the Masters—it would have been the baby boy’s birthdate and Willett said he would have definitely been home.

“Fortunately enough, he listened to my prayers and he came early,” Willett said. “It’s been a ridiculously awesome 12 days [from birth to victory]. Words can’t describe what I’m feeling right now. But words

Five of the last 10 Masters have been won by players from outside the United States. From top: 2013 champion Adam Scott, Charl Schwartzel (2011), Angel Cabrera (2009) and 2008 victor Trevor Immelman.

definitely can't describe how I was feeling when you get to hold something that me and my wife have made. It's just incredibly surreal."

Golf is a selfish sport and the hours and hours of practice required, time that exceeds the tournament play itself, can eat into the humanity of a player, if he allows it. It hardly seems that Willett will. When asked his plans immediately after the Masters, he responded by saying: "Get home, put the kettle on, and change some nappies. I'm looking forward to spending time with Nicole and the little man. It's been a tough week leaving him when he was only just born."

But at the same time, the potential for a new star was born, though Willett was hardly an overnight sensation. Ever since he got hooked on the game at age 11, he's been a worker. His first coach, Peter Ball, had this to say about him to the Associated Press: "The most notable thing was in the



Four-time major winner Ernie Els, who still plays in Europe as well as the United States, considers European Tour conditions to be tougher than those in the PGA. "It's a rough tour to be on," he says.

winter when he was getting better, he'd stay there until it was absolutely pitch black, chipping and putting under the lights of the club. I'd say to him, it's pitch black, freezing cold, you really should be going home. His ability to work was incredible."

That work ethic was put to the test when he decided to come to Jacksonville State University. "It was there I learned how to practice properly," Willett said. "I had to manage my own time. I was in the gym six days a week. I had to qualify on a weekly basis. And I had my schoolwork, too. I had to keep up a grade average."

Then after qualifying for the European Tour, he had to learn how to live and work on it, something that he will have to do on the PGA Tour, but Els sees that job as far easier even though the competition is the very best.

"The competition on the U.S. tour is a little bit stiffer," says Els. "You can imagine flying around the world on the European Tour going

from destination to destination, your body is different, your concentration is different, there is a little difference in the scoring, which on the U.S. tour will be a little bit lower. The competition is stiffer from the best players in the field to the last player in the field," he explains. "Because of the traveling [on the European Tour], it's a rough tour to be on, and that affects your play. The travel and the conditions on the U.S. tour are much better—even if the competition is tougher."

If only Willett can duplicate Els' success of switching between the tours, of traveling the globe, of racking up a Hall of Fame record. Els could have just stayed in the United States, but he's a devoted global golfer.

"I'm proud and glad I'm still playing in Europe because I love that side of the sword as well," says Els. "I'm a greedy guy. I love playing in Asia, I love playing in South Africa and England. And I love playing in the U.S. If you can do both, there is no better job in the world."

Lee Westwood has been a major influence on Willett. Although Westwood has come up short of winning a major, the Englishman finished tied second in this year's Masters and was paired with Willett on the final day. Willett found Westwood's presence comforting and reassuring as he put together his bogey-free final round.

"I couldn't have asked for a better pairing," said Willett. "Playing so much with Lee and Darren [Clarke] has helped me be comfortable around great players. My coach, Pete Cowan, told me earlier this year that I have to be comfortable in uncomfortable situations."

Westwood moved to the United States in 2012, primarily to be able to practice year round and avoid the often dreary conditions of his hometown in Worksop, England. In deciding to accept PGA Tour membership, Willett wanted to know if he needed to move to the States permanently.

"I talked to Lee about whether I need to move to the States and he told me he managed fine when he was living in Worksop," said Willett. "So I don't see the need to move over permanently. Lee said I should pick the events I want to play in, know my schedule and stick to it."

He seems apparent that Willett is the sort of player who will make decisions and stick to them, whatever the situation. He's impressed Faldo with his tenacity.

"I've chatted with him over the last couple of years and at the Match Play at Harding Park [last year] and you knew he could be a dark horse, that sort of player," says Faldo. "He's got his one-dimensional game, and he knows his own stuff. He's got very simple swing thoughts. 'If I aim left I swing left, if I aim right I swing right.' He's got confidence. As people would say, he was not embarrassed to be confident."

Coming down the stretch at Augusta, Danny Willett was one confident player, and another accomplished and talented player nurtured by the European Tour. He's coming to America, but he's a child of the world. ♦

Jeff Williams is a contributing editor of CIGAR AFICIONADO.



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DOWNTOWN VEGAS MAY NEVER REGAIN ITS STAR POWER, BUT REVITALIZATION HAS BROUGHT NEW LIFE AND NEW INTEREST TO THIS OLDER PART OF SIN CITY

BY MICHAEL KAPLAN PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOMAS MUSCIONICO



Six years ago, Fitzgeralds Hotel & Casino was your classic downtown Vegas dump, complete with old carpeting, lighting that cast a sickly hue and a cramped corner-bar unfit for sipping even the cheapest draft beer. Down the street, the Golden Gate was famous for being the oldest continually run casino in Vegas—and from the looks of the place, you wouldn't have needed any convincing. A couple of blocks away, the weirdly named Gold Spike was the kind of seedy dive you didn't want to walk past, much less walk into. If you were brave enough to venture a few blocks east of the El Cortez—which wears its

The Golden Gate (opposite page) is the oldest hotel in Las Vegas. Derek Stevens (above) stands in front of The D Las Vegas Casino. Previously Fitzgeralds, The D is emblematic of the efforts to revitalize and rebrand downtown Las Vegas.

retro cachet a lot better now than it did in the early 2000s—you encountered motels that pretty much served as crack dens and hoped you didn't get jumped. That was downtown Las Vegas. No more.

Now that same walk will take you to a well-curated bookstore called The Writer's Block. Or the newly opened Chow restaurant where the Chinese southern fried chicken draws raves. Or a big barn of a shop called 11th Street Records, that specializes in vinyl and doubles as a live music venue, where Brandon Flowers—lead singer of the locally formed but nationally known band The Killers—turns up for surprise solo sets. “We’re not getting J-Lo down



Live performances (left) and themed casual restaurants like the Heart Attack Grill (right) are bringing in more foot traffic to downtown Vegas.

here, but we don't want her," says Ryan Doherty, whose Commonwealth bar was one of the businesses that started downtown's resurgence. "When we first opened, there was a huge homeless contingent. It's gotten a lot cleaner and safer. I see people pushing strollers through the neighborhood. It's not something that I would have imagined six or seven years ago."

These days, Fitzgeralds is no more. It has been rebranded and redone as The D, an initial that stands for both Derek and Detroit. In 2011 new owner Derek Stevens, in partnership with his brother Gregory, put \$15 million into the place and made it a cool, casual spot for gambling and simply hanging out. It's also a place where you can eat well. Unlikely as it sounds, Andiamo Italian Steak House by Joe Vicari serves some of Vegas's best prime beef in a setting that is comfortably old school, with sequestering banquettes, solicitous waiters and a soundtrack of classical music. The aptly named Long Bar covers one side of the casino and it's where the jaunty, crewcutted Stevens likes to spend his nights. He bets sports, enjoys drinks and will chat you up about whatever games happen to be playing on the monitors that line a back wall. If he didn't own the joint, Stevens would probably nip off to the craps pit, with cash in hand and a smile on his face.

Stevens is playing a major role in turning downtown Las Vegas into the kind of place where you want to spend time. Besides the D, the Stevens brothers also own the Golden Gate, another diamond in the rough that Derek has buffed to a shiny finish. Having made his first fortune in Detroit via the auto parts business, he bought into the Gate in 2008. Initially, the brothers had partnered in the operation with the previous owner, Mark Brandenburg, whose grandfather had been one of 22 Italian Americans to have founded the place. "There's a photo in the lobby that is a partners' picture from the 1970s," Stevens tells me. "It could be an opening shot for the sequel to *Goodfellas*. It's a great, great photograph."

**"I gave drivers my card
and told them that
anytime they dump
somebody at my place
I would give them a 20."**

Gangsterish nostalgia aside, there wasn't a whole lot else good about the operation when Stevens came along with a vital infusion of cash. "The casino closed at 10 p.m., which is when I'm used to things ramping up," says Stevens who, along with his brother, would go on to buy out Brandenburg in 2015 and own the entire place. "Table games had a limit of \$200 and the chips were so old that you could barely tell the red from the green from the black. We replaced those, we started raising the limits and kept the casino open around the clock." He also livened up the music and installed so-called party pits, where female dealers bare their midriffs and keep the gaming upbeat.

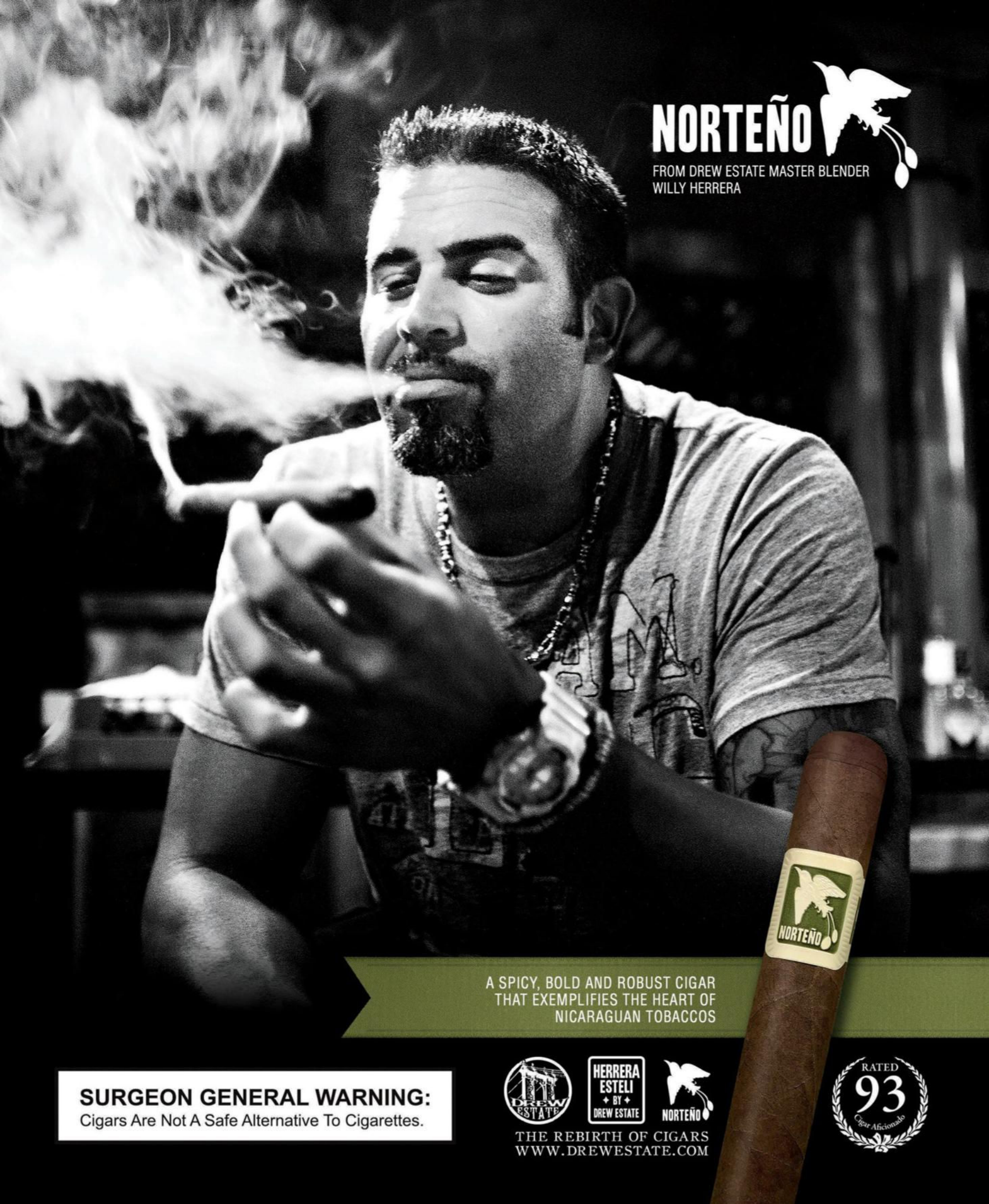
When Stevens first got involved, the Gate had no hosts for drawing players, so he took matters into his own hands. A regular customer at Bellagio and Paris casinos, Stevens buddied up with Strip limo drivers and incentivized them to bring him business. "I gave drivers my card and told them that anytime they dump somebody at my place I would give them a 20," he remembers, reveling in the home-brewed nature of it all. "They'd call to tell me a customer was coming, I'd wait at the door, hand the driver a 20 and shake the customer's hand. Then I'd bring him inside and buy him a drink. We'd talk a little bit and hopefully he'd gamble. Steve Wynn might have done that when he owned the Golden Nugget down here. But up at his [current] place, on the Strip, he's dealing with a lot more zeros. I saw the personal touch as a huge opportunity, a way to do things that they can't do on the Strip. We used paper and pencil to keep track of how many people were coming into the casino. It was all pretty easy."

Stevens has since refined his approach. He lets the gamblers find him at the Long Bar—easy to spot, he's usually wearing a flashy sport jacket, having learned "subtlety doesn't pay in Las Vegas"—and they can play for \$5,000 a hand if they feel like it. Still hungry for growth and not shy about

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publicity, Stevens recently purchased the old Vegas Club, a shuttered casino where business had tanked and the asbestos needed to be removed. It once stood as a downtown landmark and Stevens hopes to bring back its former glory and then some. It's been reported that he and his brother paid \$40 million for the decrepit gambling den.

He acknowledges that he did not need another casino. But he wasn't crazy about the people who were talking about buying the languishing property and turning it into an oversized pharmacy. "I have nothing against Walgreens and Rite Aid, but I don't think people want to come down here for a good time and see a place that makes them think about their high cholesterol and blood-pressure medicine," says Stevens. "They come here to see what they don't see in Mainstream USA."

Doherty, however, believes that there was something more practical and less romantic at play.

"I think Derek had strong feelings about package liquor being sold," says Doherty, referring to the fact that pharmacies in Vegas tend to have liquor licenses and undersell casino bars and booze retailers. Either way, Stevens sounds like he plans on doing something special with the old Las Vegas Club. He's gotten rid of the asbestos and is in the process of stress-testing for wind with the intention of adding height to the towers. But that's just the beginning. "I think downtown can now support a casino that has additional amenities," he says. "I'm thinking there could be a great pool, great spa, great restaurants, a really great sports betting experience." He ticks off the Golden Nugget, Four Queens and California Club as downtown properties that are all upgrading their accommodations. Then he adds, "Now is a time to provide more upscale rooms in this market."

Assuming he doesn't mean that downtown—which remains a bit rough around the edges—could handle a Bellagio-style hotel, I ask if he's thinking of something along the lines of the Palms.

Without hesitation, Stevens responds, "There is an opportunity to do something a little nicer than that."

Derek Stevens is not the only one making a pitch for dominating the once toxic downtown Las Vegas. Also putting in money and buying up property is Tony Hsieh (pronounced shay). He made his fortune in tech and founded the online shoe retailer Zappos. Hsieh relocated his company to Las Vegas because he viewed it as the best city in America for round-the-clock customer service.

Like Stevens, he also became enamored with downtown. Unlike Stevens, he has no interest in gambling. Instead, he's using an investment of some \$350 million to back businesses that he hopes will build community and turn the beaten up neighborhood into something more akin to Austin's downtown. Hence, when he purchased the once treacherous Gold Spike, Hsieh put the property's gaming license into cold storage and outfitted the place with foosball and ping-pong tables. It looks like a student center rec room instead of the down-and-dirty joint that it had once been. There are those who view that as crazy. But Hsieh figures that Las Vegas has enough gambling.

Under the auspices of the Downtown Project, he's backed a raft of businesses, like record and book stores; a fairly unique retail/recreation space called the Container Park (fronted by a giant statue of a praying mantis that shoots flames into the air); enough restaurants that downtown starts to feel like a dining destination; and a music festival called Life is Beautiful (since sold to Doherty's company). Hsieh is aiming to make a



WHERE TO SMOKE IN DOWNTOWN VEGAS

Downtown Las Vegas feels like the kind of place where you should have a cigar clenched between your teeth at all times. A handful of spots in the neon-drenched neighborhood make it easy to do. Here are five of our favorite haunts where cigar smoking is encouraged.

Chicago Brewing Company and Cigar Lounge

Besides boasting an awesome lineup of craft beers, Chicago Brewing Company features a nice selection of bar grub: quesadillas, filet mignon sliders, potato skins and the like. Best of all, you can smoke while you eat. Sadly, this has become a rarity in Vegas.

Four Queens Hotel, 202 Fremont Street, (702) 385-4011, fourqueens.com

Benny's Bullpen Sports Bar and Cigar Lounge

Benny "The Cowboy" Binion had his faults, which included a nonchalant attitude toward rubbing out enemies, but the man was a great casino owner in that he always wanted his guests to be happy. This spot—with sports-betting, a selection of cigars for sale, fine cocktails and good beer—would surely bring a smile to old Benny's face.

Binion's Gambling Hall & Hotel, 128 East Fremont Street, (702) 382-1600, binions.com

Rocco's Imported Tobaccos

Conveniently situated alongside Oscar's Steakhouse, named for the frisky former Mayor Oscar Goodman, Rocco's features a high-quality assortment of cigars. Chairs are positioned right outside for casually relaxing smokes. Need a drink to go with your cigar? Just flag down a casino waitress for a cocktail or else bring out a signature Martini stirred or shaken at Oscar's.

Plaza, 1 Main Street, (800) 634-6575, plazahotelcasino.com

Atomic Liquors

Once famous as the place where patrons stood on the roof to watch nuclear bombs being tested in the distance, Atomic is now a great joint for enjoying cigars. Puff away inside the old-school drinking-room or else out on the patio. Additional cool points: It ranks among Anthony Bourdain's favorite Vegas bars.

917 Fremont Street, (702) 982-3000, atomicvegas.com

Parlour Bar

A gorgeous little time capsule of a cocktail lounge, the Parlour looks like a cigar smoker's paradise. Comfy leather chairs, small tables with ashtrays and knowledgeable bartenders who are definitely not new to the craft all conspire to make this a great place for lighting up and imbibing.

El Cortez Hotel and Casino, 600 Fremont Street, (702) 385-5200, elcortezhotelcasino.com

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desirable neighborhood for locals that will attract talent to Zappos, which is now headquartered in what had once been Las Vegas's City Hall.

What's strange is that if you walk along Fremont Street, Las Vegas Boulevard seems to be the DMZ. On one side of it is the Heart Attack Grill, where anybody over 350-pounds eats for free and the milkshakes get augmented with sticks of butter. Beyond that is the so-called Fremont Street Experience with live cover bands, street performers, vendors selling all manner of gewgaws and, yes, the casinos.

Directly across from the Grill, on the other side of Las Vegas Boulevard, stands a funky but cool restaurant called Park on Fremont. It's a Doherty-owned neighborhood food and drink spot with a clientele of mostly youngish, more-or-less hip locals. The two crowds don't do a whole lot of mixing. But Hsieh doesn't seem to mind. "Derek and I are 74 percent simpatico," he says, downing his first of what will be six shots of the digestif Fernet over the course of our 30-minute interview. "I think he is here for the right reasons and we always look for reasons to work together."

I mention the oddness of their two worlds abutting, yet remaining segregated. He corrects me, pointing out that there have been occasions when folks from the gambling world mingled with his crowd of happening locals. "When we threw Life Is Beautiful, Derek not only supported it but people went to the D for after parties." He gushes about the electronic dance music (EDM) concerts that Stevens hosted on a large parcel of property he owns near his casinos.

After I confess that I thought he and Stevens were in a sort of tussle for the soul of downtown Las Vegas, one focusing on gambling and the other focusing on, well, shots of Fernet, Hsieh corrects my narrative. He tells me that he used to come to Vegas to play poker at the Bellagio and then he makes something abundantly clear: "I am not anti-gambling. I am anti Las Vegas being pigeonholed as one thing."

Then the idiosyncratic billionaire, who established a trailer park so that he could live there in his Airstream, calls for another round of Fernet and adds, "I'm all about experiences. Anything that gives me a unique, memorable experience, I am interested in."

With a bankroll of nearly half-a-billion dollars, he is on his way to accomplishing his goal. What it will look like in 10 years and whether or not his ventures will be profitable are anybody's guess. After downing the shot, he considers the two sides of Vegas Boulevard and says, "There are bright lights and fire in both directions."



Tony Hsieh (top) is the force behind Downtown Container Park (bottom right). The 40-foot-tall fire-breathing praying mantis (bottom, left) greets pedestrians at the entrance of the emporium.

Las Vegas stole the heart of Derek Stevens long before it became an investment for him. He remembers his first trip there. The future hotelier was 19 years old and drove to Vegas from Los Angeles with a friend. "I had 40 bucks on me and he had 60," says Stevens, holding court in a booth at Andiamo steakhouse, sipping wine, twirling pasta, working his way through an entrée of Chilean sea bass. "We got ourselves a room at the Dunes and the first thing I played was Sigma Derby, the little horse racing game." He's referring to the electromagnetic race in

which gamblers bet on which metallic nag will win. Stevens says that he wants to get a couple of them for his casinos, and I assume it's for old-time's sake and not because the house maintains a 10 to 20 percent edge on the wagering. "Then we won 40 bucks at roulette, paid for another night and fell in love with Vegas. We used the remaining \$10 to buy a couple of \$5 cigars."

As his wealth grew so did his trips to Las Vegas. For pleasure and for conventions, he became a Sin City regular, staying at the old Aladdin for a while, then Hard Rock and later Mirage and Bellagio. "I thought it was the best," he enthuses in a tone that makes it easy to understand the success he's finding as a casino owner—he understands his customers because he's one of them. "Come to Vegas, get a room for a few nights, get fed, have a few drinks and gamble. This is the greatest city in America."



Derek Stevens lights up at his favorite seat in The D—the Longbar. It's part of the casual atmosphere that Stevens invested \$15 million to create, along with his brother, Gregory.

He developed into an avid dice player and began looking at investment opportunities that could be more remunerative than laying down chips on the felt. Stevens made substantial stock investments in the slot manufacturer IGT and in the Rio All-Suite Las Vegas Hotel and Casino. He characterizes both businesses as having had "incredible runs." Rio, he adds, "went from one tower to three and I did really well when it sold [to Caesars Entertainment]. That got me a little curious about Vegas."

Next came an equity investment in the floundering Riviera. "Then I started buying debt there and when the Riviera filed for bankruptcy, I converted the debt to equity and we ended up with 11 or 12 percent of the property," says Stevens. "We just sold the Riviera a little more than a year ago."

Around 2007, Stevens decided to live the dream of most every recreational gambler: He wanted to enjoy the house advantage by owning a casino. Or at least a piece of one. He started looking around the state of Nevada for a suitable property, but it wasn't long before he set his sites on Vegas exclusively. That led to his getting involved in the Golden Gate partnership. He saw it as a way of figuring out whether or not he'd embrace the day-to-day reality of overseeing a casino. "I like running businesses," he says, explaining the rationale. "And I knew that if things didn't work out I could always pack up and return to Detroit."

It took only six months for Stevens to confirm that gaming was for

him. "By that point," he says, "people were calling me and wanting to check out the place. I liked the idea of people wanting to come over. I also like the idea of getting involved in a business that doesn't have a key or lock on the front door. That's literally a fact at the Golden Gate. When we did the renovation there in 2008, we needed to shut down temporarily and discovered that there are no locks. It hadn't been closed since the day that President Kennedy was shot."

Stevens and his partner put in a couple of penthouse high-roller suites that would not look out of place on the Strip. The more standard suites—which really are long, narrow, loft-style rooms—look great, feel great, offer generous proportions and might be the biggest bargains in Vegas, usually selling for less than \$100 per night. In fact, on the evening that we meet, there's an issue over which guests will get the high-roller suites and which will be in a standard suite. "We only have two of those penthouses and three guests want to check into them tonight," he says, smiling in a way that tells me it's a good problem to have. "The hotel sold one, and two hosts promised them to gamblers. Right now, I've got three employees in an office fighting it out."

By the time he bought Fitzgeralds, Stevens felt like a practiced hand in Vegas. He chartered a 747 to fly in guests for opening parties on two consecutive weekends. He had already played an active role in cleaning up the area around his properties and installing offbeat amenities such as a zipline that, not coincidentally, seems to fly folks from one end of his mini empire to the other. He also developed a freewheeling management style where anything can happen on the spur of the moment. It's led to some odd promotions including a drawing for the casino owner's muscle cars. First to go was a Dodge Challenger Hellcat. Up for the taking at the moment is a new Shelby GT350 with a production of only 2,000. "I love giving away cars," he gushes. "The more slots you play, the better your odds of winning the car. I think it's kind of cool to give my car away to a player." Plus it's not lost on him that having the flashy ride parked right in front of his casino draws foot traffic.

That might be a mildly surprising gimmick, but the real shocker came in 2012 when a blundered call by a fill-in NFL ref cost bettors a win. Stevens made himself look like the sportiest casino owner on earth. He paid off the winning wagers and refunded money to the losers. That decision was solidified within two days after the game had been played. "I remember exactly how much we refunded but I will never reveal the number," says Stevens after I express curiosity as to what it cost him to cancel his side of the bet. "That generated a lot of publicity."

As did a situation that began in late 2014 when he made a \$20,000 future bet that Michigan State would win the 2015 NCAA basketball championship. The bet came within a single game of paying off. It would have resulted in a \$1 million windfall for Stevens. "It got pretty crazy," he says. "If I make another bet like that and wind up going far with it, I don't know that I will go public."

Considering that Stevens has an unquenchable penchant for publicity and a knack for leveraging every situation, that seems likely to be a bigger longshot than any wager on the board. ♦

Michael Kaplan is a CIGAR AFICIONADO contributing editor.

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Although they couldn't appear much different, the GMC Sierra Denali (above) and the Tesla XP90D (right) are both classified as trucks by virtue of their platforms. They also may compete in the arena of tony features.

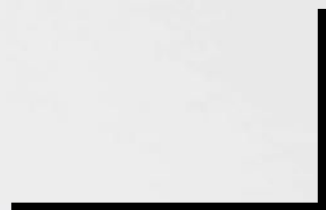


From SUVs to sports cars and even pickups, rugged vehicles are getting the royal treatment and stretching the definition of “truck.”

BY PAUL A. EISENSTEIN



TRUCKS





Bentley's new Bentayga (right and below) is the world's fastest SUV. Order the Breitling Mulliner Tourbillon option (inset) and you double the \$230,000 baseline price.



The visitor gets a once-over, surrendering camera and cell-phone before being asked to sign a strict nondisclosure agreement. He's led through the well-guarded house, then out back through the garden leading him into a tent. There he glimpses the secret project that has consumed Bentley designers and engineers for more than four years. Finally rolling into showrooms now, the Bentley Bentayga is being billed as "the fastest, most powerful, most luxurious, most exclusive SUV in the world." The company might also have said "most expensive," with a sticker starting around \$230,000 and going well into the \$400,000 range fully loaded. It's a vehicle priced right between more traditional premium-luxury models like the Bentley GT Coupe and the flagship Mulsanne sedan.

The British maker won't have the ultra-premium SUV segment to itself for long. The market is about to get downright crowded. The who's-who list of the world's most exclusive automotive makers set to roll out

new utility vehicles of their own includes such stalwarts as Maserati, Aston Martin, Lamborghini and Rolls-Royce. More mainstream Land Rover is rapidly pushing up-market with the limited-edition Holland & Holland long-wheelbase Range Rover Autobiography Black. If the name doesn't take your breath away, how about the \$285,000 price tag?

The rapid move into the utility-vehicle segment by exclusive manufacturers probably shouldn't come as a surprise. It reflects the broader shift to brawny wheelbases supporting opulent rides in an increasingly truck-centric market. Pickups are having one of their best years ever, and new, well-equipped trucks are pushing into increasingly upscale territory.

A luxury pickup? Lincoln tried several times to plant its badge on a bed, with poor results. It sold less than 1,000 of the quirky Blackwood models of a decade ago. To no surprise, considering the high cost and minimal functionality. Blackwood featured a power tonneau cover over its wood and chrome-lined bed that would crush even a standard grocery



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The rapid move into the utility-vehicle segment by exclusive manufacturers reflects the broader shift in an increasingly truck-centric automotive market.

bag when the cover closed. And Lincoln didn't score much better with a rebadged version of the F-150 sold by the sibling Ford brand.

That said, Ford can barely keep up with demand for heavily loaded versions of the F-150 itself. Ford was stunned by sales of the King Ranch edition, equipped with leather seats, high-end audio systems, seat and steering wheel heaters and other upscale accoutrements. It nudged a bit higher with the Platinum and recently added the even more upscale Limited. These days, it's not hard to find an F-150 Limited with a price tag pushing north of \$70,000.

Chevrolet has seen a similar shift in demand for the full-sized Silverado pickup. And General Motors' GMC has scored a smash hit with the Sierra. The "premium" Denali, now accounts for about a third of its sales.

That said, the real growth is in luxury utility vehicles. Once the purview of blue-collar workers and rugged outdoorsmen, they have been gaining ground across the board. According to IHS Automotive, utility vehicles almost outsold sedans in the United States for the first time last year. Add pickups, vans and minivans, and the "light truck" segment accounted for 58 percent of 2015 sales. Joe Hinrichs, Ford Motor Co.'s president of the Americas, expects utility vehicles alone to gain as much as 10 more points this decade. And while America might be truck crazy, it's not unique. Demand is surging everywhere from Berlin to Beijing.

Entry-level buyers are rapidly migrating away from small cars like the Honda Fit to the maker's new HR-V. The attainable luxury brand Cadillac, which has the big Escalade and mid-range XT5 (which this year replaces the old SRX), will add three new utes before the end of the decade.

Hyundai, which is launching an all-new luxury brand this year, is working up three, and possibly four new SUVs, two for the Genesis division. Without those "we're out of whack, a fish swimming upstream," in the current environment, explains Dave Zuchowski, CEO of Hyundai Motor America.

Land Rover was among the first to spot the potential, bringing the exclusive Range Rover to its showrooms alongside more traditional off-road offerings. A decade ago, Porsche had skeptics scratching their heads when it announced plans to introduce its own luxury ute, the Cayenne. That's now the brand's most popular model and, analysts will tell you, the key to Porsche's current global success. It recently debuted a second, slightly smaller model, the Macan, and can barely keep up with demand.

Mercedes-Benz, through its Geländewagen (G-Wagen), was an early entrant. At least initially, it was a peculiar niche offering suited to military and rescue crews. The Mercedes ML came closer to the mainstream bull's-eye and the German maker has since added so many utility vehicles that it renamed them all, hoping to help consumers figure them out. For Ford's struggling



The Ford F-150 Limited handles towing and hauling duties, but comes with features, such as steering wheel heaters, that you'd expect in a high-line sedan.



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Land Rover was one of the leaders in bringing spiff to SUVs. Its SVAutobiography sports 550 horsepower and a slide-out trunk compartment (inset).

Lincoln division, the Navigator has long been its most recognizable product. It now offers three other utility vehicles, from full-sized down. The compact MKC has become the strongest hit Lincoln has had in years.

Overall, the luxury segment is where we're seeing the fastest growth of utility vehicles, both in sales and available offerings. It is most obvious in the ultra-premium market. As buyers migrate out of traditional vehicles, no high-end manufacturer wants to be left behind.

Surprisingly, it was Lamborghini that introduced one of the first truly upscale SUVs in 30 years. The Italian maker, today a subsidiary of Volkswagen, briefly offered the LM002, which was widely known as the "Rambo Lambo." It sold a mere 328 of them between 1986 and 1993, but it's looking to sell at least three times as many—each year—when it gets back into the business in 2018. It is doubling the size of its operations in the Modena suburb of Sant'Agata, while adding another 500 jobs, to produce the new Urus, which former CEO Stefan Winkelmann (now with Audi) called "crucial" for the success of the company. "We need to be present in a growing segment that is becoming very well distributed all over the world." He adds that he expects the willingness of luxury buyers to pay a hefty premium for utility vehicles to "protect our sports cars."

Another Italian automaker betting big on SUVs is Maserati. The high-line division of Fiat Chrysler just officially revealed its first offering in the form of the Levante. Originally unveiled as the Kubang concept vehicle at the 2011 Frankfurt Motor Show, the idea was to borrow from the best of the Fiat Chrysler family, lifting bits of the familiar Grand Cherokee platform and pairing it with a Ferrari-derived V-8. Like many of its luxury competitors, Maserati is putting the emphasis as much on "sport" as on "utility" with the 2017 Levante—no surprise considering it will be going up against the likes of the Porsche Cayenne, the first real luxury alternative to a classic sports car or sports sedan.

Rolls-Royce is another brand where a utility vehicle might seem a rolling contradiction in terms. And, indeed, the maker refers to its

as-yet-unnamed model as a "sport-activity vehicle," or SAV, rather than a sport-ute, adding that it will be a "high-bodied car with an all-aluminum architecture...that can cross any terrain."

To calm the nerves of those elite motorists who still might not get it, Rolls CEO Torsten Müller-Ötvös stresses that while the new ute will mark "another seminal moment," it is not entirely unique in "Rolls-Royce's 111-year journey." He points to the British brand's "pioneering, adventurous spirit," and to one of the U.K.'s true adventurers, British Lieutenant T.E. Lawrence. Better known as Lawrence of Arabia, he used a squadron of armored Rolls-Royces during his campaign against Turkish forces during World War I. In fact, there were six squadrons formed during the "War to End All Wars." Lawrence later proclaimed, "I should like my own Rolls-Royce car with enough tires and petrol to last me all my life."

Exactly what Rolls' sport-activity vehicle will look like remains top secret, but it's expected to share some of its underlying components with the full-sized X7 SAV being developed by the British maker's parent, BMW. That's common in an industry where so-called platform sharing helps improve economies of scale.

In sharp contrast with early luxury SUVs like the Mercedes G-Wagen and Lambo's LM-002, the vast majority of today's high-line utes are more formally designated "crossover-utility vehicles." They're based on beefed-up versions of the same unibody architectures found in conventional passenger cars. The classic utility vehicle, using a massive body-on-frame design, has all but vanished. While that sometimes—though not always—reduces off-road capabilities, it can yield big improvements in on-road manners: handling, performance and fuel economy in particular.

Even classic "truck-truck" models, such as the big Range Rover, have gone through significant changes. The latest version of that ute shed hundreds of pounds of mass by migrating from steel to lightweight aluminum. That translates into big improvements in maneuverability, as well as mileage.

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Manufacturers are adopting downsized and turbo-charged engines, more efficient 8-, 9- and 10-speed gearboxes and technologies like stop/start. The latter briefly shuts the engine off, rather than letting it idle while waiting for a light, before automatically starting back up when the driver's foot lifts off the brake.

Expect to see a growing number of utility vehicles adopt battery-based drivetrains, including Toyota Prius-like hybrid systems, and more advanced plug-ins. That's the approach taken by Volvo with its new XC90 SUV. Just named North American Truck/Utility Vehicle of the Year, the XC90's fastest and most powerful version uses a plug-in system that the Swedes are calling a Twin

Engine. Meanwhile, Mercedes plans to have 10 plug-in hybrids in production by 2017 and that will include several of its utes, including the newly renamed GLE: the former ML-Class.

Tesla took things further down the road when it introduced its first crossover-utility vehicle, the Model X. With its distinctive "falcon-wing" doors, the Model X P90D Signature Edition will deliver up to 257 miles on battery power alone—for a price tag of \$132,000. It will also go from 0 to 60 in around 3.2 seconds if you opt for Tesla's new LUDICROUS MODE, only about 0.3 seconds slower than the low-slung Tesla Model S sedan.

Audi recently revealed plans to produce the e-tron Quattro Concept it unveiled last September. The street model is expected to hit 60 in less than 4.5 seconds, and travel more than 500 kilometers, or over 310 miles, using a 95 kilowatt-hour lithium-ion battery pack. Using one of 440-volt Level III chargers now appearing across the country, Audi says it will need barely 50 minutes to recharge.

On top of all that technology, the latest luxury SUVs are adding even more of the accoutrements upscale buyers expect. The Bentley Bentayga is loaded with the latest safety and creature comfort technologies, in some cases, more than even on the flagship Bentley Mulsanne. That includes advanced infotainment systems, front and back, as well as forward-collision-avoidance technology that can detect not only a stopped car but also a pedestrian. There's even an "event seat," a slide-and-fold system that can be used to tailgate party in style. Not only are there comfortable, foldout seats but the Bentley Bentayga can be ordered with a built-in picnic basket. Make that a portable catering system, as there are bins for china and silverware, as well as a compact powered food cooler.

Incidentally, the most expensive option on the Bentayga—and likely any new luxury SUV—is the Breitling Mulliner Tourbillon clock. The self-winding system will spin the clock around three times every 15 minutes. And to be sure it's wound—or simply to impress friends—a motorist will have a button to tap to spin it one more time. The Tourbillon will cost about \$234,000, or more than the base Bentayga itself.

Bentley is so upbeat about the SUV's options that it is giving serious thought to adding a second, lower-range utility vehicle. "We are a fairly small company and can't have too many balls in the air at the same time," cautions CEO Wolfgang Dürheimer. But if the Bentayga is as successful as Bentley believes it will be, don't be surprised to see it expand its SUV range. And its competitors likely wouldn't be far behind. ♦

Paul A. Eisenstein is publisher of the website TheDetroitBureau.com.



Today's utility vehicles make strange bedfellows, with the family-oriented Volvo (XC90, center) populating a category that includes high performance brands: Lamborghini (Urus, top) and Maserati (Levante, bottom).

The rapid plunge in fuel prices has been a major factor in the equally quick surge in SUV sales this past year. Yet, Ford's Hinrichs is betting that even if—or, more likely, when—we see \$4-a-gallon gas again, demand will remain strong. Improved efficiency is a key factor. Most utility vehicles today suffer only a modest mileage penalty compared with similarly sized sedans and coupes, while offering the features buyers seem to crave, including extra space and a better view of the road.

Even as luxury buyers would seem particularly unmotivated by any rise in gas prices, industry studies show that elite motorists are calling for greener vehicle technology. So-called lightweighting, such as the switch from steel to aluminum and even carbon fiber, will help.



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Wrapper: Habano Ecuador.
Binder: Dominican Corojo.
Filler: Piloto Cubano, Criollo 98,
Pelo de Oro.

La Galera - Connecticut 20 ct Box

Wrapper: Connecticut Ecuador.
Binder: Piloto Cubano.
Filler: Dominican T-112,
Piloto Cubano, Criollo 98.

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BIG SMOKE EVENINGS

**FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 11 & SATURDAY,
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NEW FOR THIS YEAR:

VIP early access 5:30 p.m. entry. VIP Tickets give you more time to visit with the cigar makers and collect your cigars.

Friday and Saturday evenings, from 6:30-9:30 pm, are our traditional, fun-filled, Big Smoke evenings. Join your fellow cigar lovers in an atmosphere of good cigars, good drinks, good food and great companionship.

Walk around and enjoy cigars from more than 25 premium cigar producers. Your ticket price includes a cigar from each cigar exhibitor. Cigars will be listed on CigarAficionado.com as well as LasVegasBigSmoke.com on September 15.

Complementing this perfect evening are premium liquors, wines, beer, and other fine spirits from the extensive array of drink exhibitors, as well as a delicious buffet specially created for a cigar maven.

Also on display are luxury cars, golf equipment and many more items appealing to every aficionado.



BIG SMOKE SEMINARS

Saturday and Sunday daytime hours will be filled with a series of seminars geared to the varied interests of our readers. These will be taught by experts in each field and are designed to be interesting, fun and instructive.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 12

Saturday morning's program is scheduled from 9 am to 12:30 pm followed by a sit-down lunch lasting until 3 pm. Dave Savona, executive editor, *Cigar Aficionado*, is moderator for the weekend program.

The top cigars of 2015 were selected by our senior editors and announced on the *Cigar Aficionado* website in December 2015. When you enter, you will be given a packet containing the top three legal cigars of 2015. At each of the morning cigar breaks we will designate one cigar to smoke. Each cigar maker is onstage to talk about their cigar:

#1 CIGAR—My Father Le Bijou 1922 Torpedo Box Pressed presented by the Garcia family

#3 CIGAR—CAO Flathead V660 Carb presented by General Cigar

#4 CIGAR—Arturo Fuente Don Carlos Belicoso presented by Carlos Fuente Jr., president, A. Fuente y Cia.

A CIGAR LOVERS GUIDE TO CUBA. A look at what has changed, what has not, and what you need to know before you go. Presented by Gordon Mott, senior contributing editor, and David Savona, executive editor, *Cigar Aficionado*.

THE NEXT GENERATION. Meet the heirs to cigar dynasties making their mark on the future of their brands. Moderated by Gregory Mottola, senior editor, and Andrew Nagy, associate editor, *Cigar Aficionado*: Tony Gomez, La Flor Dominicana; Raquel Quesada, Quesada Cigars; Liana Fuente, Arturo Fuente Cigars.

ANATOMY OF A CIGAR. Exactly what is a cigar? At this seminar we take apart and try to understand it from inside out, from fill to wrapper. The panel of experts will be announced.

HONDURAN CIGARS. An inside look at what makes them so distinctive by a panel of experts on Honduran cigars and tobacco.

LUNCH WITH OLIVA CIGAR COMPANY. Enjoy a delicious seated lunch hosted by Jose Oliva, president, Oliva Cigar Company. There will be cigars for everyone and plenty of time for a Q & A session.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 13

Sunday's program from 9:30 am - 1:00 pm consists of three seminars on a lighter note involving a hands-on approach.

CIGAR LOVERS' BREAKFAST. Start the day with a real *Cigar Aficionado's* breakfast. Chef Nicole Brisson from CarneVino returns to create a breakfast menu specifically designed for this cigar-loving crowd. She will share some of her tales from the kitchen. Of course, we will find the perfect cigar to match this breakfast.

ROLL YOUR OWN, SEMINAR NO. 19. Michael Giannini and Leo Peraza of General Cigar Co. bring everything you need to create your own cigar including real tobacco as used in a premium cigar factory. Follow along with one of La Gloria Cubana's most experienced premium cigar makers. Whether you've done this before or you are a new roller, everyone enjoys the opportunity to roll and create their own cigar and perhaps win a prize.

TOURING SCOTCH-LAND. From the Highlands to the Lowlands and points in between, single-malt Scotch offers a breadth of local styles. *Cigar Aficionado's* senior features editor Jack Bettridge will lead a cigar-pairing journey through the country's many distilling regions.

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REGISTRATION

Buy a Big Smoke evening ticket for **\$325 per ticket each night.**
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Or, come to the entire weekend program for **\$625.** This fee includes Saturday and Sunday seminars, Saturday lunch and one Big Smoke evening (either Friday or Saturday, you select). With VIP access it's **\$675.**

HOTEL

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cigars

116 BLIND TASTING

Our panel of cigar-smoking editors assesses the quality of 82 cigars from around the world in a blind taste test, including two smokes that scored 94 points.

130 VINTAGE TASTING

An eclectic tasting of old cigars like the elusive La Flor de Cano Short Churchill, and a handmade Cabañas that turned in a near-perfect performance, despite its age.

132 DION GIOLITO: MASTER OF ILLUSION

The creator of Illusione cigars took his personal fascination with conspiracy theories and combined it with his love of tobacco to create a critically acclaimed cigar brand.

141 THE HUMIDORS OF HAVANA

Peer into the workshop of Humidores Habana, a humble operation that creates some of the most resplendent trophy humidors to come out of Cuba.

144 A \$1.8 MILLION NIGHT FOR CHARITY

Sports stars gathered at CIGAR AFICIONADO's 22nd Night To Remember, an annual charity dinner that raised nearly \$2 million for prostate cancer research.

148 HALL OF FAME, CLASS OF 2016

CIGAR AFICIONADO inducts three new members into its exclusive club: Litto Gomez, Jorge Padrón and Rocky Patel.

JEFF HARRIS



churchills

There were plenty of high-scoring Churchills in this blind tasting, but none performed on the same level as the Cuban Bolivar Corona Gigante, which rose to the top of the list at 93 points. It's one of the few Cuban Churchills still in production and turned in a regal, harmonious performance despite Bolivar's reputation for heavy-handed, earthy tobacco. Five cigars scored 90 points, all ranging in style. The Brick House Churchill from J. C. Newman is a vintage brand that dates back to the early days of the company. This Nicaraguan Churchill is a fine bargain. The Falto Los Processos is made in the Dominican Republic by La Aurora for Tabacalera Falto, a company based in Puerto Rico. The Hoyo de Monterrey Excalibur No. 1 showed a lot of character for a cigar covered in a Connecticut shade wrapper, leaning earthy and fruity rather than grassy and light. The Montecristo Platinum Series is a stronger offshoot of Altadis U.S.A.'s valuable heritage brand, fortified with heavy tobaccos. Made by the Plasencias in Nicaragua, the Nat Sherman Panamericana is one of the newest releases from the New York-based retailer and company.



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 47 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: NOVEMBER 2015

BOLIVAR CORONA GIGANTE

Topped with an attractive mounted head, this well-made Churchill exhibits richness with every puff, showing an earthy palate of coffee, walnut and cedar notes that all harmonize for a complex finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £22.86

93



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

BRICK HOUSE CHURCHILL

A large Churchill that delivers strong impressions of leather, wood and a touch of minerality, before picking up hints of nougat and a coffee bean finish.
U.S.: \$6.55 U.K.: N/A

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

FALTO LOS PROCESSOS EMINENTE

Oily and attractive, this Churchill draws evenly. Initial flinty notes become sweet with a dried fruit and molasses quality that lead to a toasty, vanilla bean finish.
U.S.: \$13.50 U.K.: N/A

90



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 7 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS,
DOM. REP.
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

HOYO DE MONTERREY EXCALIBUR NO. 1

A large, lightly colored cigar whose even draw shows a bit of resistance. It's a sweet and bready smoke showing a fruity character and an earthy note of raw cocoa before a mineral finish.
U.S.: \$7.89 U.K.: N/A

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA,
PERU
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: MEXICO

MONTECRISTO PLATINUM SERIES CHURCHILL (TUBO)

There's an oily gleam to the wrapper of this large Churchill, which smokes evenly. Woody and wheaty notes are joined by minerals, saltiness and a floral finish.
U.S.: \$10.60 U.K.: N/A

90

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: COSTA RICA, NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

NAT SHERMAN PANAMERICANA JULIETA

The initial flinty and tangy notes of this Churchill settle down to show a dried fruit and licorice character that recurs on the finish along with touches of leather.
U.S.: \$12.00 U.K.: N/A

90

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

AGING ROOM QUATTRO F59 CONCERTO

This sharply pressed Churchill smokes evenly and exhibits elements of coffee bean, charcoal and a hint of vermouth. There's a touch of sweetness on the finish.
U.S.: \$10.23 U.K.: N/A

89

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

SAN LOTANO CONNECTICUT CHURCHILL

A big, tan Churchill with an even burn and draw. First puffs are fairly strong with spice and earth. Tangy notes of dried orange peel complement a bready, cinnamon finish. Stronger than it looks.
U.S.: \$7.00 U.K.: N/A

89

**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: HONDURAS
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

CAMACHO COROJO CHURCHILL

This big Churchill is mostly wheaty and woody in character with touches of maple sweetness and an earthy finish.
U.S.: \$8.25 U.K.: N/A

88

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 58 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

LA AURORA 107 MADURO GRAN 107

Nearly black in appearance, this imposingly large cigar forms a flaky white ash. Each puff is full of overripe fruit and heavy licorice notes that become a bit chatty on the finish.
U.S.: \$9.50 U.K.: N/A

88

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA, PERU
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ROMEO Y JULIETA ANIVERSARIO CHURCHILL

The head of this Churchill is notably soft. Sweet notes of candied coconut and marshmallow come through, but flavors are muted and a bit papery.
U.S.: \$9.79 U.K.: N/A

87

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

LA SIRENA TRIDENT

Rough and gritty in appearance, this Churchill imparts a sweet note of heavily oaked rum and a touch of walnut, though tart and chalky notes offset the score.
U.S.: \$10.80 U.K.: N/A

86

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 47 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

CABAIGUAN IMPERIALES

The draw of this lightly colored Churchill is notably firm. Initial notes are light and papery before showing hints of earth and pepper and a slightly acidic finish.
U.S.: \$9.75 U.K.: N/A

85

corona gordas

One would hope that the grandeur of a 50th anniversary cigar (and expensive humidor to go with it) would mean exceptional tobacco. In the case of the Padrón 50th Anniversary Limited Edition, which scored 94 points, all expectations for excellence were met. It's a long, box-pressed toro and offered all the rich signature qualities of a commemorative Padrón—including the high pricetag. Three cigars scored 91 points. Villiger's La Libertad may be called a Churchill, but at 6 1/2 inches long, we still classify it as a corona gorda. The Punch Punch is a classic Cuban, but the Partagás Corona Gorda Añejados boasts extra, pre-market box-aging, even though it was released this year.



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PADRÓN 50TH ANNIVERSARY LIMITED EDITION (NATURAL)

A beautifully pressed cigar with a superb draw and burn. It weaves rich notes of leather and wood with nuanced impressions of cocoa and almond.
U.S.: \$40.00 U.K.: N/A

94



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: PERU
WRAPPER: PERU

LA LIBERTAD CHURCHILL

The full, open draw of this subtly pressed cigar layers the palate with dense smoke, leaving impressions of nutmeg, cinnamon and crushed peanuts before a black tea finish.
U.S.: \$6.00 U.K.: N/A

91



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: OCTOBER 2008

PARTAGÁS CORONA GORDA AÑEJADOS

A subtly box-pressed cigar with an excellent three-seam cap. The firm draw shows notes of dried fruit and sweet nuts before leading to a warm, breadly finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £21.60

91



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JUNE 2015

PUNCH PUNCH

Well made with an impeccable three-seam cap. The smoke maintains a warm, toasty quality while imparting sweet molasses notes, a touch of baker's chocolate and a rich almond finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £17.33

91



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

ESPINOSA ESPECIAL NO. 5

Rolled with a rough-looking wrapper, this cigar develops a nutty, caramel quality, complemented by persistent underlying earthiness. The finish is chewy.
U.S.: \$8.95 U.K.: N/A

90



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

FLOR DE LAS ANTILLAS TUBO

This corona gorda has a lush draw and burns evenly. Hearty red meat notes are balanced by hints of minerals, earth and sweet toffee. A strong and meaty smoke.
U.S.: \$24.00 (PACK OF THREE CIGARS) U.K.: N/A

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

HENRY CLAY STALK CUT GRAN CORONA
Squarely pressed with a pigtail cap and uncut foot, this cigar has a lush, even draw that leaves big notes of brown sugar, leather and hazelnuts on the palate.
U.S.: \$8.00 U.K.: N/A

90



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JANUARY 2015

JUAN LOPEZ SELECCIÓN NO. 1
The prominent graham cracker notes of this corona gorda intermingle with a sweet nuttiness and an elegant salty finish. The draw and burn remain even throughout.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £17.20

90



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

LA HACIENDA GRAN ROBUSTO
A finely crafted robusto with an oily wrapper and three-seam cap. First puffs are very floral, but settle down to show a woodier, nuttier smoke with touches of brown sugar.
U.S.: \$7.95 U.K.: N/A

90



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, BRAZIL
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

AZAN WHITE PREMIUM TORO DE LUXE
A large toro that smokes evenly, delivering big notes of smoked meats and minerals accompanied by a hickory sweetness and a touch of fruit.
U.S.: \$9.00 U.K.: N/A

89



HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: HONDURAS, DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. HABANO
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

HOYO DE TRADICIÓN TORO GRANDE
Packed solid with tobacco, this box-pressed cigar wears a slightly gritty wrapper. It's woody and floral with hints of fruit and nuts that lead to an oily finish.
U.S.: \$6.99 U.K.: N/A

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: MEXICO

KRISTOFF SAN ANDRÉS ROBUSTO
Near-black with a knotted pigtail cap and an uncut foot. There's a big note of rye bread and an earthy undertone with touches of coffee and cashew, but the finish is chalky and acidic.
U.S.: \$8.76 U.K.: N/A

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

ASHTON MONARCH
This yellowish toro is as mild as it looks, though the smoke has a dense, chewy texture. It's a bready smoke, elevated by nutmeg and cinnamon notes before a flinty finish.
U.S.: \$11.85 U.K.: N/A

88



HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ILLUSIONE EPERNAY LE GRANDE
The rough wrapper of this cigar is covered in glue stains from top to bottom. Sweet notes of pistachio and graham cracker also carry a briny, olive-like quality, but the finish is dry.
U.S.: \$9.50 U.K.: N/A

88

figurados

When brand owner Ernesto Perez-Carrillo wrapped hearty Nicaraguan tobaccos with a Connecticut-seed binder from Ecuador and a particularly dark Mexican San Andrés cover leaf, the result was the E.P. Carrillo Selección Oscuro, and the Piramides Royal scored 93 points. As the “Oscuro” in the name suggests, it’s a strikingly dark cigar but exhibits a balance of power and finesse. This distinguished tasting of figurados turned up plenty of shapely cigars that broke the 90-point threshold. The perfectly symmetrical Davidoff Nicaragua Diadema is a testament to the training and rolling abilities of the craftsmen found at Cigars Davidoff in the Dominican Republic. It scored 91 points, as did the Room101 Johnny Tobacconaut Chingonova, which is a cosmically themed cigar made in Honduras at the newly expanded AgroIndustrias Laepe S.A. factory. Saint Luis Rey may not have the star power of the bigger brands in the Altadis U.S.A. portfolio, but the Belicoso is a great cigar and a great bargain. At \$5.48, it’s one of the least expensive cigars listed in the entire issue. The Belicoso is made at Flor de Copan in Honduras.



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"

FILLER: NICARAGUA

BINDER: ECUADOR

WRAPPER: MEXICO

E.P. CARRILLO SELECCIÓN OSCURO PIRAMIDES ROYAL

Enrobed in a dark-brown wrapper, this torpedo shows a nuanced interplay of rich woods, dried fruit and toast. The long finish is redolent of chocolate-covered raisins.

U.S.: \$8.25 U.K.: N/A

93



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6 1/2"

FILLER: NICARAGUA

BINDER: NICARAGUA

WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

DAVIDOFF NICARAGUA DIADEMA

Crafted with double tapers, this figurado is perfectly symmetrical and burns evenly. A touch of initial flintiness dissipates to show rich woods, savory leather and a chewy finish of chocolate-covered almonds.

U.S.: \$19.20 U.K.: N/A

91



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 8"

FILLER: NICARAGUA

BINDER: NICARAGUA

WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ROOM101 JOHNNY TOBACCONAUT CHINGONOVA

A big figurado with a dead-even burn and a lush draw. Notes of nuanced woods, toast and vanilla finesse the palate before a sweet, herbal finish.

U.S.: \$14.00 U.K.: N/A

91



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"

FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA,

PERU

BINDER: NICARAGUA

WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

SAINT LUIS REY BELICOSO

Abundant notes of dried red fruits and berries are well balanced by vanilla bean and nougat intonations and a touch of charcoal on the finish. This torpedo smokes evenly throughout.

U.S.: \$5.48 U.K.: N/A

91



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 3/4"

FILLER: DOM. REP.

BINDER: DOM. REP.

WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

ARTURO FUENTE AÑEJO RESERVA NO. 888

This long, thin figurado wears a near-black wrapper and a sharply tapered head. Strong coffee and earth notes are balanced by woods and a touch of maple sweetness.

U.S.: \$11.55 U.K.: N/A

90



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4 3/4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2015

MONTECRISTO PETIT NO. 2

This tan, minibelicoso is bold and earthy, but at the same time creamy and floral with some almond notes and a tangy orange peel finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £18.22

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA,
BRAZIL
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: BRAZIL

BALMORAL AÑEJO XO TORPEDO MK52

Hints of oaky vanilla and earth come through every puff of this dark belicoso. Woody, fruity notes emerge as well, before a minty, eucalyptus finish.
U.S.: \$8.50 U.K.: N/A

89



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: AUGUST 2014

H. UPMANN NO. 2

The wrapper of this pyramid is sandy and porous but dark and oily as well. Nutty, woody intonations also carry touches of earth and gingersnap, but the smoke leaves a chalky aftertaste.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £21.18

89



U.S.A.
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA PALINA FAMILY SERIES MIAMI ALISON

A primarily woody, toasty cigar with hints of vanilla bean, cedar and faint chocolate. The smoke remains medium bodied throughout.
U.S.: \$18.00 U.K.: N/A

89



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 57 LENGTH: 7 1/4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: AUGUST 2015

CUABA SALOMON

Sublime tapers make this a beautiful salomon to behold. It's salty with tangy touches of picked ginger and some woodiness but the smoke is muted. An uneven burn corrects itself.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £35.43

88



HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: HONDURAS, DOM. REP.
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

CAMACHO CONNECTICUT FIGURADO

A light tan torpedo that produces a flaky ash as it burns. Its even draw imparts a mild, reedy, woody smoke with a vaguely sweet tea quality.
U.S.: \$8.50 U.K.: N/A

87



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

**THE BANKER BY H. UPMANN
BASIS POINT NO. 2**

This dark, oily torpedo draws evenly, delivering notes of black pepper and leather offset by a damp woodiness and touch of acidity.
U.S.: \$8.47 U.K.: N/A

87



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

SAN CRISTOBAL ELEGANCIA PYRAMID

Grassy and floral, this lightly hued torpedo offers a fairly mild smoke with muted notes of lemon peel and traces of acidity on the finish.
U.S.: \$7.50 U.K.: N/A

85

grandes

Cigars with ring gauges of 60 and larger may have seemed like a novelty at first, but demand for these thick smokes has not gone away and cigarmakers are taking this log-like format seriously. Take CAO, for example. The CAO Colombia Bogota scored 92 points on account of its creative, multination blending. Colombia is part of CAO's country-themed cigar lines (Brazilia, Italia) and showcases Colombian tobacco grown from a seed referred to as Ica Mazinga. La Flor Dominicana's Air Bender Maduro is composed mostly of Dominican tobaccos but finished with an Ecuadoran Habano wrapper. The blend scaled up to a 60 ring gauge faithfully, as the Valiente scored 91 points.



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: COLOMBIA, BRAZIL
BINDER: CAMEROON
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

CAO COLOMBIA BOGOTA

A large, thick cigar that draws and burns evenly. Its core of earth and wood is balanced by sweet, fruity notes of black cherry and nougat with a nutty touch of cashew.
U.S.: \$7.85 U.K.: N/A

92



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA FLOR DOMINICANA AIR BENDER MADURO VALIENTE

Wrapped in a dark, oily cover leaf, this cigar smokes evenly, showing notes of toasty charcoal and spice that lead into a sweet, oaky finish.
U.S.: \$9.00 U.K.: N/A

91



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

ALEC BRADLEY POST EMBARGO GORDO

This fat cigar wears an attractive brown wrapper and smokes well, imparting notes of nuts and cedar that meld pleasantly with leather and raw cocoa bean.
U.S.: \$9.25 U.K.: N/A

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 5 7/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

INCH NATURAL BY E.P. CARRILLO NO. 60

Big and veiny, this hefty cigar burns a bit unevenly, but offers a smoke that is sweet with maple syrup and toasted coconut with woody, oaky undertones.
U.S.: \$8.75 U.K.: N/A

90



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

HERITAGE BY DUNHILL GIGANTE

Notes of ripe apple with leathery underpinnings take on a BBQ charcoal quality and a touch of pepper. The woody finish is redolent of dried twigs. It's a large, toothy cigar.
U.S.: \$12.95 U.K.: N/A

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PADRÓN 7000 MADURO

Earthy and woody, this thick cigar imparts hints of mint, anise and cardamom before a fresh pine finish.
U.S.: \$8.10 U.K.: N/A

89

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

**PERDOMO HABANO BOURBON
BARREL-AGED MADURO GORDO**

A very dark log of a cigar with a bold earthy character. Notes of caraway seed and minerals also emerge before the woody, coconut finish.

U.S.: \$8.75 U.K.: N/A

89**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

THE EDGE LITE BATTALION

A fat, large blond cigar that's sweet and mild with hints of fruit and a notably floral finish.

U.S.: \$8.65 U.K.: N/A

89**U.S.A.**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

**CASA FERNANDEZ MIAMI RESERVA
COROJO TITAN**

The burn of this thick cigar is uneven and wavy, but the draw is full and substantial. It offers a cedary, herbal smoke that becomes nutty and fruity yet remains medium bodied.

U.S.: \$9.68 U.K.: N/A

88**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: HONDURAS
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

EIROA 60X6

Topped with a three-seam cap, this tawny-colored cigar has a nutty, woody core framed by notes of cumin, earth and black tea.

U.S.: \$12.76 U.K.: N/A

88**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: BRAZIL, NICARAGUA BINDER:
ECUADOR
WRAPPER: MEXICO

MY UZI WEIGHS A TON 6X60

Earthy and peppery with heavy mineral notes. It's balanced by sweet touches of toffee. This big, dark cigar draws and burns evenly.

U.S.: \$9.50 U.K.: N/A

88**U.S.A.**

RING GAUGE: 62 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

**DON PEPIN GARCIA ORIGINAL
TORO GRANDE BOX PRESSED**

An ultra-fat smoke that forms a big solid ash. Big woody notes of hickory and mesquite are buttressed by a steady earthy undertone and a tangy finish.

U.S.: \$9.60 U.K.: N/A

87**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.,
BRAZIL
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MACANUDO CRÜ ROYALE GIGANTE

A big, dark log of a cigar with an exceptionally rounded head. It's tangy and woody with a bready note and a mineral finish.

U.S.: \$7.49 U.K.: N/A

87**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

COHIBA NICARAGUA N60

Dark and fat with a jagged cap, this large cigar has a rustic quality with charry, earthy notes, hints of perfume and a chalky finish.

U.S.: \$15.49 U.K.: N/A

86

petit coronas

Classic petit coronas, if rolled properly, can deliver surprisingly large volumes of smoke and plenty of complexity, regardless of the diminutive size. Cuba has always excelled at producing high-quality petits, and this tasting reflects that tradition. The H. Upmann Petit Corona scored 91 points for its complex layers of flavor. The Cohiba Siglo I may be the smallest cigar in Cohiba's Siglo Series (Linea 1492), but it was full of enough character and body to score 90 points. Made in Nicaragua's oldest cigar factory, the Joya de Nicaragua Antaño 1970 Machito is arguably the quintessential Nicaraguan petit corona while the Surrogates Cracker Crumbs represents a more modern blend.



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2015

H. UPMANN PETIT CORONA

A softly pressed corona with rounded edges and tapered shoulders. The burn is notably firm, but delivers a chewy smoke full of brown sugar notes and baking spices balanced by cedar and a marzipan finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £11.69

91



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MARCH 2014

COHIBA SIGLO I

Gleaming with a golden-brown wrapper, this little corona starts out woody and minty but warms to show a walnut character that leads to a mint-chocolate finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £12.80

90



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 4 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

JOYA DE NICARAGUA ANTAÑO 1970 MACHITO

This dark little smoke forms a very white ash as it burns. Notes of coffee and oak combine with hints of sour cherry and an oaky finish.
U.S.: \$5.40 U.K.: N/A

90



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

SURROGATES CRACKER CRUMBS

Nutty and rich, this dark corona has a precut head. Each puff imparts graham cracker sweetness with hints of coffee and charcoal on the finish.
U.S.: \$15.00 (FIVE CIGARS) U.K.: N/A

90



HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4 1/4"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: COSTA RICA
WRAPPERS: ECUADOR, BRAZIL

7-20-4 HUSTLER SERIES DOG WALKER

A barber-pole corona crafted with two wrappers. It draws perfectly, registering on the palate as bitter and tangy before taking on an earthiness and licorice finish.
U.S.: \$6.00 U.K.: N/A

89



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: NOVEMBER 2013

RAFAEL GONZALEZ PERLA

Despite the small size, this little tawny-colored cigar has a voluminous draw that imparts a smoke loaded with oak and maple notes accentuated by black pepper and earthy carob.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £8.72

89



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 4 3/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: AUGUST 2015

RAMON ALLONES SMALL CLUB CORONA
A predominantly earthy smoke that also imparts salty notes and touches of coffee and minerals despite its notably firm draw.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £9.70

89



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4 3/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: NOVEMBER 2015

TRINIDAD REYES
The lush, full draw of this solidly rolled petit corona shows a brawny, salty character with a gingersnap note and a bold, black pepper finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £10.40

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 41 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.,
U.S.A./PENN. BROADLEAF
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

VIVA REPUBLICA ADVANCED WARFARE PETIT CORONA
Enrobed in a dark wrapper, this small cigar has a lush draw that leaves strong impressions of coffee bean and black pepper with touches of leather and slight acidity.
U.S.: \$5.00 U.K.: N/A

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

ARTURO FUENTE PETIT CORONA
A squarely pressed petit corona that starts out sharp and woody, but warms to show a walnut and mesquite quality with touches of vanilla and a licorice finish.
U.S.: \$5.65 U.K.: N/A

88



NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

OLIVA CONNECTICUT RESERVE PETIT CORONA
Lightly hued with a great, lush draw and flaky ash. There's a touch of molasses that comes through over the primarily woody smoke.
U.S.: \$4.93 U.K.: N/A

88



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 41 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DAVIDOFF MILLENNIUM BLEND SERIES PETIT CORONA
An earthy, musty cigar with touches of pepper and a woody finish. It's near-perfect in appearance with an even draw and burn.
U.S.: \$12.70 U.K.: N/A

87



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 41 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DAVIDOFF GRAND CRU NO. 5
This tan little smoke draws and burns perfectly, offering a vaguely nutty smoke that becomes grassy and papery.
U.S.: \$10.70 U.K.: N/A

86



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

QUESADA TRIBUTO ALVARITO
The rich, earthy notes of this dark little cigar are balanced by nuttiness and a touch of leather, but a bitter quality hurt the score.
U.S.: \$5.50 U.K.: N/A

86

robustos

There is something exquisite about Oliva's Serie V Melanio blend. The Figurado won CIGAR AFICIONADO's 2014 Cigar of the Year award, and the Robusto scored an impressive 94 points in this tasting. Both sizes fall into the same class of overachieving cigars. The Robusto owes its tenor to the blend of Nicaraguan tobaccos and the Sumatra seed wrapper grown in Ecuador. Alec Bradley's Post Embargo Robusto scored 91 points. The name refers to brand owner Alan Rubin's wish to see an open market where Cuban and non-Cuban cigars can compete on an even playing field. The Honduran Punch Gran Puro Santa Rita scored 91 points as well and is a remarkable bargain.



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

OLIVA SERIE V MELANIO ROBUSTO

Beautifully box pressed, this silky robusto finesse the palate with a toasty smoke that is sweet and intense with cedar and maple before segueing into a rich and nutty nougat-like finish. A balanced cigar.
U.S.: \$9.74 U.K.: N/A

94



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

ALEC BRADLEY POST EMBARGO ROBUSTO

An oily robusto with a very dark wrapper. Notes of cedar and nuts lead to a spicy, leathery character with a profound accompanying sweetness.
U.S.: \$8.00 U.K.: N/A

91



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: HONDURAS
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

PUNCH GRAN PURO SANTA RITA

First puffs of this dark, reddish-brown robusto are nutty with cashew notes and hints of fresh coconut. The toasty finish smacks of earth and cacao.
U.S.: \$5.29 U.K.: N/A

91



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. HABANO
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

CAO FLATHEAD SPARKPLUG

Gleaming with oils, this dark, box-pressed robusto is made with an abruptly flat head. There's a strong combination of coffee bean and earth accentuated by notes of black pepper and raisins.
U.S.: \$6.75 U.K.: N/A

90



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN BROADLEAF

NICA RUSTICA SHORT ROBUSTO

A blackish cigar applied with a sloppy pigtail cap. Its toasty coffee bean character also has an earthy quality enlivened by an herbal anise note.
U.S.: \$5.95 U.K.: N/A

90



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

ROCKY PATEL TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY ROBUSTO GRANDE

The oak and hickory character of this box-pressed robusto is enlivened by a spicy cinnamon zing, touch of graham cracker and mineral finish.
U.S.: \$10.35 U.K.: N/A

90

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4 3/4"

FILLER: DOM. REP.

BINDER: DOM. REP.

WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DIAMOND CROWN JULIUS CAESER ROBUSTO

Initial puffs of this darkly wrapped robusto taste a bit green, but pick up heartier notes of black pepper and leather. The finish is oaky.

U.S.: \$11.50 U.K.: N/A

89

**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5"

FILLER: NICARAGUA

BINDER: NICARAGUA

WRAPPER: HONDURAS

PADILLA COROJO '99 ROBUSTO

Dark and oily, this robusto forms a very flaky ash. Bold leather and black pepper notes settle down to show warm elements of pecan and a woody finish.

U.S.: \$6.00 U.K.: N/A

89

**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"

FILLER: CUBA

BINDER: CUBA

WRAPPER: CUBA

BOX DATE: AUGUST 2015

PARTAGÁS SERIE D NO. 4

Pale, with a slightly greenish hue, this robusto is topped with a three-seam cap. Predominantly floral in character, the smoke has elements of wood and almond.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £17.62

89

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 4 7/8"

FILLER: NICARAGUA

BINDER: HONDURAS

WRAPPER: ECUADOR

HERRERA ESTELI SHORT CORONA GORDA

This little cigar is covered in a wrapper with a healthy Colorado complexion, though it burns unevenly. Rich earthy notes combine with peppermint notes and woodiness before becoming muddled with minerals and an herbal finish.

U.S.: \$8.08 U.K.: N/A

88

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 56 LENGTH: 5"

FILLER: DOM. REP., U.S.A./CONN.

BROADLEAF, NICARAGUA

BINDER: NICARAGUA

WRAPPER: MEXICO

AFR-75 EDICION LIMITADA SUBLIME

A blackish cigar with a pigtail cap. The smoke is toasty with licorice intonations, floral notes and sweet pecans, but the finish becomes slightly bitter.

U.S.: \$14.75 U.K.: N/A

87

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 56 LENGTH: 5"

FILLER: U.S.A./PENN. BROADLEAF,

NICARAGUA, PERU

BINDER: DOM. REP.

WRAPPER: MEXICO

FRATELLO BIANCO III

Though the draw is a bit firm, it imparts an earthy combination of anise, raw cocoa bean and charcoal. The finish has the earthy quality of fresh roots.

U.S.: \$9.00 U.K.: N/A

87

**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 1/2"

FILLER: NICARAGUA, U.S.A./PENN.

BROADLEAF

BINDER: ECUADOR

WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

HOYO ROTHSCCHILD

Covered in a strikingly oily wrapper, this is a spicy smoke with intermittent notes of leather, charcoal and coffee.

U.S.: \$5.49 U.K.: N/A

87

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4 3/4"

FILLER: DOM. REP.

BINDER: DOM. REP.

WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

HAMMER + SICKLE MOSCOW CITY PETITE ROBUSTO

There's a persistent mustiness to this otherwise woody, herbal smoke, which also carries a touch of sharp white pepper. It's covered in a veiny, matte wrapper.

U.S.: \$8.50 U.K.: N/A

86

Cigars are listed first by country and then by score. Please refer to the main tasting pages for notes and prices.

CIGAR AFICIONADO'S 100-POINT SCALE

Classic
95–100
Outstanding
90–94
Very good to excellent
80–89
Average to good
commercial quality
70–79
Don't waste your money
60–69
Not available
n/a

*Note: all prices are
manufacturers' suggested
retail, before taxes.*

CUBA

- 93 Bolivar Corona Gigante
- 91 H. Upmann Petit Corona
- 91 Partagás Corona Gorda Añejados
- 91 Punch Punch
- 90 Cohiba Siglo I
- 90 Juan Lopez Selección No. 1
- 90 Montecristo Petit No. 2
- 89 H. Upmann No. 2
- 89 Partagás Serie D No. 4
- 89 Rafael Gonzalez Perla
- 89 Ramon Allones Small Club Corona
- 89 Trinidad Reyes
- 88 Cuaba Salomon

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

- 93 E.P. Carrillo Selección Oscuro Piramides Royal
- 91 Davidoff Nicaragua Diadema
- 91 La Flor Dominicana Air Bender Maduro Valiente
- 91 La Libertad Churchill
- 90 Arturo Fuente Añejo Reserva No. 888
- 90 Falto Los Processos Eminente
- 90 Henry Clay Stalk Cut Gran Corona
- 90 Inch Natural by E.P. Carrillo No. 60
- 90 Montecristo Platinum Series Churchill (Tubo)
- 89 Aging Room Quattro F59 Concerto
- 89 Balmoral Añejo XO Torpedo Mk52
- 89 Diamond Crown Julius Caesar Robusto
- 89 Kristoff San Andrés Robusto
- 89 Viva Republica Advanced Warfare Petit Corona
- 88 Arturo Fuente Petit Corona
- 88 Ashton Monarch
- 88 La Aurora 107 Maduro Gran 107
- 87 AFR-75 Edicion Limitada Sublime
- 87 Davidoff Millennium Blend Series Petit Corona
- 87 Macanudo Crü Royale Gigante
- 87 Romeo y Julieta Aniversario Churchill
- 87 The Banker by H. Upmann Basis Point No. 2
- 86 Davidoff Grand Cru No. 5
- 86 Hammer + Sickle Moscow City Petite Robusto
- 86 Quesada Tributo Alvarito

HONDURAS

- 91 Alec Bradley Post Embargo Robusto
- 91 Punch Gran Puro Santa Rita
- 91 Room101 Johnny Tobacconaut Chingonova

- 91 Saint Luis Rey Belicoso
- 90 Alec Bradley Post Embargo Gordo
- 90 Hoyo de Monterrey Excalibur No. 1
- 90 Rocky Patel Twentieth Anniversary Robusto Grande
- 89 7-20-4 Hustler Series Dog Walker
- 89 Heritage By Dunhill Gigante
- 89 Hoyo de Tradición Toro Grande
- 89 Padilla Corojo '99 Robusto
- 89 The Edge Lite Battalion
- 88 Camacho Corojo Churchill
- 88 Eiroa 60x6
- 88 Illusione Epernay Le Grande
- 87 Camacho Connecticut Figurado
- 87 Hoyo Rothschild

NICARAGUA

- 94 Oliva Serie V Melanio Robusto
- 94 Padrón 50th Anniversary Limited Edition Natural
- 92 CAO Colombia Bogota
- 90 Brick House Churchill
- 90 CAO Flathead Sparkplug
- 90 Espinosa Especial No. 5
- 90 Flor de las Antillas Tubo
- 90 Joya de Nicaragua Antaño 1970 Machito
- 90 La Hacienda Gran Robusto
- 90 Nat Sherman Panamericana Julieta
- 90 Nica Rustica Short Robusto
- 90 Surrogates Cracker Crumbs
- 89 Azan White Premium Toro de Luxe
- 89 Padrón 7000 Maduro
- 89 Perdomo Habano Bourbon Barrel-Aged Maduro Gordo
- 89 San Lotano Connecticut Churchill
- 88 Herrera Esteli Short Corona Gorda
- 88 My Uzi Weighs a Ton 6x60
- 88 Oliva Connecticut Reserve Petit Corona
- 87 Fratello Bianco III
- 86 Cohiba Nicaragua N60
- 86 La Sirena Trident
- 85 Cabaiguan Imperiales
- 85 San Cristobal Elegancia Pyramid

U.S.A.

- 89 La Palina Family Series Miami Alison
- 88 Casa Fernandez Miami Reserva Corojo Titan
- 87 Don Pepin Garcia Original Toro Grande Box Pressed

UNLOCK THE VAULT



The new Toraño Vault Series takes a name from the past and reinvents it for the future. Vault TM-027 boasts a flavorful Mexican San Andres Oscuro wrapper, and Vault P-044 features a rich Nicaraguan Sun Grown wrapper.

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connoisseur's corner

Cabañas is an old Cuban cigar brand that was once made by hand, but fell victim to the post-Embargo world and was cancelled. In later years it was brought back as a machine-made cigar. This review shows how marvelous the old handmade varieties could be. Despite being nearly old enough to earn a Social Security check, a 1955 Cabañas was loaded with intriguing flavors of baking spices, giving it a 99-point performance. (A Por Larrañaga from 1958 didn't fare as well, smoking as if it was long past its prime. Not every cigar gets better with age.) An elusive 1992 La Flor de Cano Short Churchill, which attracts dear prices at auction, earned a score of 95 points. The clever name denotes not a special size, but a traditional Cuban robusto, 4 7/8 inches by 50 ring.



CABAÑAS NUMERO 51 (CIRCA 1955)

This gorgeous little smoke has beautiful texture to the wrapper. It delivers a smooth draw, brimming with rich, creamy and toasty flavors and hints of sweet nutmeg. An elegant, near-perfect pre-Castro smoke. —*Marvin R. Shanken*

99



LA FLOR DE CANO SHORT CHURCHILL (CIRCA 1992)

There are still plenty of oils seeping through the wrapper of this medium-claro robusto, which has been in a slide-lid cabinet for decades. The smoke is surprisingly dense and chewy for a cigar with so much age. It's a sweet, nutty cigar, full of maple and brown sugar notes, roasted chestnut and sweet marzipan. —*Gregory Mottola*

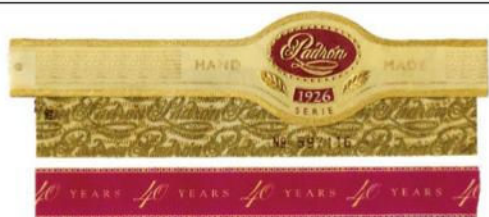
95



MONTECRISTO "A" (1995)

This imposing, nine-inch-long cigar is not something you would smoke everyday. The wrapper shows just a bit of tooth. The draw is slightly firm and the burn nearly dead even. It begins with a toasty, mellow, woody flavor, and stays medium bodied for most of the smoke, then builds in the second half. There are hints of dusty wood, cashew, and just a wisp of orange peel on the finish. A balanced, elegant cigar. —*David Savona*

94



PADRÓN SERIE 1926 40TH ANNIVERSARY MADURO (2005)

A dark and flawlessly wrapped torpedo plucked from one of the original, ornately carved wooden boxes. Upon lighting, the aroma is uncannily redolent of baking gingerbread, and those warm qualities recur on the palate. The smoke is heavy with baking spices and nutmeg but fortified with an earthiness one would expect from a Padrón. —*Gregory Mottola*

94



PARTAGÁS DE PARTAGÁS NO. 1 (2003)

This is a lonsdale with a beautiful colorado wrapper. It has a pleasant, medium-bodied profile for a 13-year-old cigar. There are some hints of cinnamon and leather on the palate with a pleasant, slightly dry finish that is very well balanced. It is a solid performer in both draw and burn, and it smokes as if it still has some years left. —*Gordon Mott*

94



POR LARRAÑAGA NUMERO 3 (CIRCA 1958)

A skinny cigar with a torpedo tip that has a light, open draw. The smoke, sadly, is showing its age, tarnished with dried out flavors. Respectable, but not all that I had hoped for. —*Marvin R. Shanken*

90

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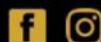


"How did my helicopter get in my pool?"
-William Paley - Owner, La Palina

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CIGAR
AFICIONADO
TOP 25
CIGARS
OF 2013

RATED
93
BY CIGAR
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2013



Dion Giolito takes a seat in one of the many lounge chairs that furnish his tobacco shop in Reno Nevada—home of the Illusione brand of cigars.

MASTER OF ILLUSIONE

Ask Dion Giolito who killed Kennedy, and he'll quickly answer: "the Mob." Did Roosevelt know in advance that Pearl Harbor was going to be attacked? "It's plausible." How about the existence of UFOs? "Definitely yes." Normally, nobody takes much notice if the makers of their favorite cigars believe in conspiracy theories, but for the Illusione cigar brand, which Giolito brought to market 10 years ago, government cover-ups and secret societies have come to define the brand's image.

"There's a fine line between having fun or being campy and not being taken seriously as a cigarmaker," contends Giolito. He gets up from a small desk in the back corner of the TABSA factory in Nicaragua and stretches his long legs. Today, it doesn't matter who killed Kennedy or how many extraterrestrials the U.S. government has in captivity. What matters is tobacco.

Standing somewhere between 6 1/2 and 7 feet tall, Dion Giolito couldn't look more out of place at a cigar factory—and it isn't just his height. The fair-skinned, Nevada-born Giolito sports an old-Vegas-period pompadour that adds to the illusion of tallness, and large, heavy sideburns—a vintage look that's been imitated ever since the birth of Rockabilly music and the emergence of Elvis. Or perhaps he resembles the comic-book hero Wolverine, depending on your generation. Either way, Giolito seems to pull off the look naturally. He also has an innate talent for blending cigars. In the decade that his Illusione brand has been commercially available, the cigars have risen from a local brand known only to Reno's modest enclave of enthusiasts to a national cigar line with comprehensive U.S. distribution. And his Illusione cigars have appeared on CIGAR AFICIONADO'S Top 25 list an impressive six times, most recently in 2015.

**DION GIOLITO, FOUNDER
OF ILLUSIONE CIGARS,
MAY DABBLE IN
CONSPIRACY THEORIES,
BUT HIS TRUE OBSESSION
IS WITH QUALITY**

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TIFFANY BROWN ANDERSON

Situated in Estelí, the heart of Nicaragua's cigar country, this grade-school-turned-factory is where most of Giolito's Illusione cigars are produced. As cigar factories go, TABSA is a small operation, but this one-story building is buzzy and clamorous with the chatter of chavetas, the shuffling of tobacco leaves, the occasional rumble and screech of wooden chair legs sliding over the tile floor. It's the cadence of any busy cigar factory, but Giolito, who easily stands an entire foot over most of the workers, spots some-

thing from across the room. He approaches a roller who's applying the binder to a cigar. Giolito stops him and takes the cigar out of his hands. In broken "factory Spanish" he instructs him how to apply the binder properly.

"You can't let the binder overlap too much during rolling," Giolito says. "It won't smoke right. The binder tobacco will overpower the cigar if you do that."

The cigar roller looks up at him with a "why-should-I-listen-to-you" expression on his face, but he quickly snuffs out his own flash of defiance and nods. He understands. When the tall man is in town, he's the one who gets to call the shots. Giolito doesn't own the factory, nor does he micromanage the workers or strut around with an air of colonial superiority. But, as the factory's star client, he pretty much gets free rein.

"Rollers can sometimes get into bad habits, especially when they're used to making a cigar to someone else's standards," he says calmly.

Giolito is referring to the other brands made in the factory. He may be the star client, but he isn't the *only* client, and a roller making Illusione cigars one day might be making a different cigar the next. "Sometimes I can communicate the problem right to the roller," Giolito explains. "If I can't, I'll have to tell the factory manager. It all depends. I don't want

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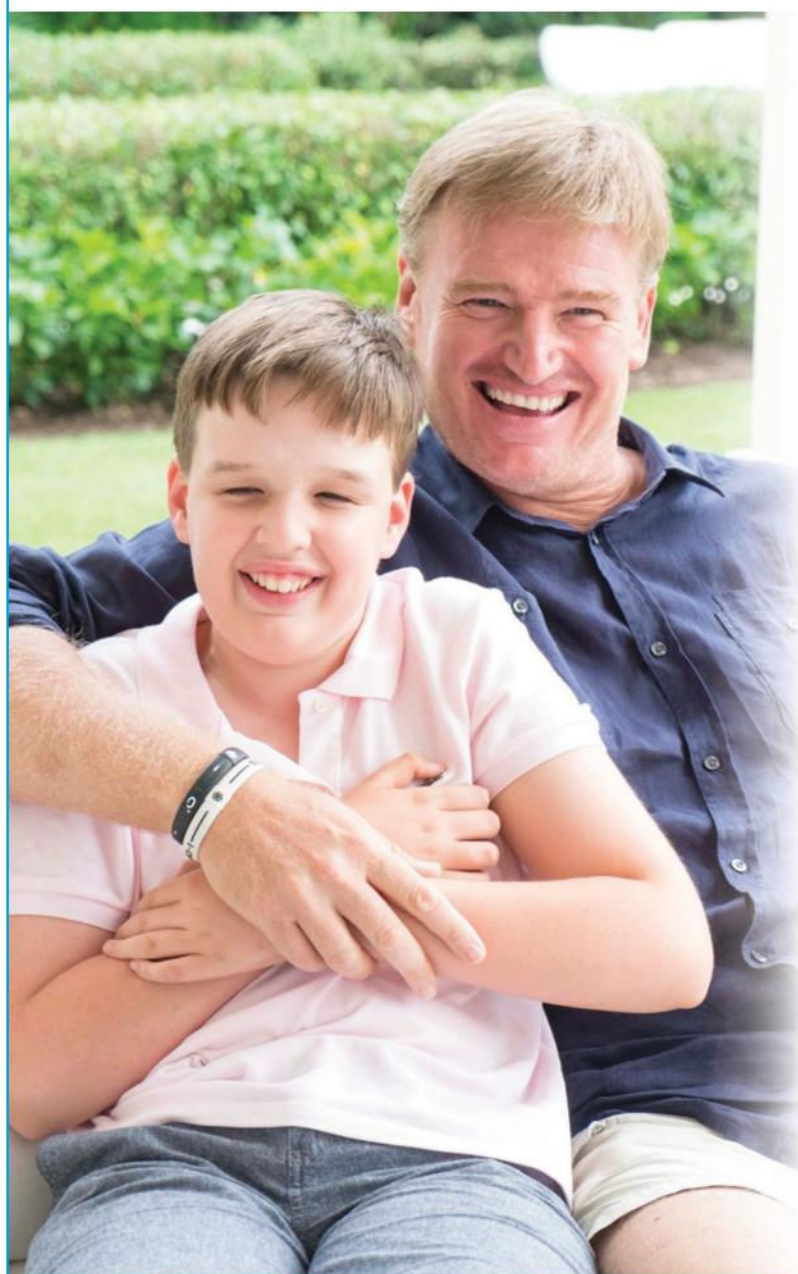


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Giolito owns a Reno, Nevada, smoke shop called Fumare. Its walk-in humidor houses the Illusione portfolio as well as plenty of third-party cigar lines.

to get anyone in trouble. I just want it done right.” He shrugs and walks across the room.

His free rein extends to the pick of the tobacco. The TABSA factory is owned by Eduardo Fernandez, co-owner of Aganorsa tobacco growers. All tobacco supplied to TABSA comes from this agricultural conglomerate, and that includes several types of varieties of tobacco from all over Nicaragua. Plots range from small farms to large plantations. Seed varieties vary as well, and Giolito is quite particular as to which tobaccos will go into which blends.

He exits the rolling gallery and walks outside into the adjacent tobacco warehouse, which is another brick building separated by an alleyway of concrete and asphalt. Giolito clears the alley in a few lithe strides and disappears through a dark doorway into the tobacco warehouse where hulking piles of tobacco are arranged for fermentation. The room is sparsely lit, but bright enough to read the description on the tags of each pile. One pile is marked “St. Nicholas,” denoting the farm, and also gives the harvest date, as well as when the tobacco was put into fermentation.

He pulls out some leaves, takes a smell and rolls up a crude little purito to smoke. The sampling process gives him an idea of how the tobacco will taste when fermentation is complete. Tobacco from the St. Nicholas farm is bright and sweet. The next hulking pile comes from a farm called Chilamate. This tobacco is nutty in flavor with a smoke that’s unctuous and mouth-coating. Giolito is partial to this tobacco and it’s easy to see why. Even in its semi-raw, under-fermented state, it’s still

oily and grand. And this is how Giolito blends. He finds a distinct, captivating tobacco, and then builds around it. If he likes it, (and is willing to pay for it) the tobacco is his.

“I start from the dirt,” says Giolito of his blending. “If I find a great tobacco that has what I’m looking for in terms of palate and olfactory, that’s what inspires me. I want it to be multidimensional. Sometimes, single tobaccos will smoke like a complete cigar and I’m impressed. And then I want to put together a blend that enhances these characteristics. In the case of Illusione Fume d’Amour [which was CIGAR AFICIONADO’S No. 3 Cigar of 2014, in the Clementes size], it was a particular seco leaf from Chilamate.”

Though Giolito is cognizant of flavor and aroma, he rarely seeks strength for strength’s sake when creating a blend. True, his Illusione Ultra line, which achieved the No. 6 Cigar of 2015, was intended to be the most full-bodied brand in the portfolio, but he didn’t just recklessly assemble an amped-up blend for brute strength alone.

“Strength is a by-product of blending,” he explains. “What I look for, first and foremost, is flavor. Personally, I prefer cigars that are mild to medium bodied. There must be flavor and complexity within the material.”

This level of involvement isn’t a given industry-wide. Often, a factory will simply produce sample blends for an investing brand-owner to try. He approves some, rejects others or asks for minor adjustments to be made on one of the prototypes. That’s when development ends and production begins.

While there's nothing inherently wrong with making a cigar this way, Giolito prefers to be much closer to the process.

"Dion knows Aganorsa tobacco very well and has specific tastes for certain farms," says Max Fernandez Pujals, director of TABSA. "When we find those tobaccos, we alert him. Much of the Aganorsa tobacco we process for TABSA is geared toward his blends. Since we have a very close working connection with Dion we smoke the materials selected for his blends with him as they begin to come from the farms."

Years of smoking through component tobaccos has given Giolito an exacting palate, and he's developed an uncommon facility for identifying tobaccos, their flavors and their performance characteristics.

"I always paid attention to the things that Henke [Kelner] said about palate stimulation," Giolito explains. "Not everybody knows why a cigar tastes good. I was able to back engineer the process and learn the characteristics of many tobaccos in a short amount of time. I got really good at ascribing different properties to different tobaccos. That goes beyond just Aganorsa tobaccos. I've become good at doing this with all types of tobaccos."

For Giolito, his serious interest in tobacco started in 1990. He had gone to school in Oklahoma for music theory and composition, but returned to Reno in 1988 and transferred to the University of Nevada to enroll in its teaching program. Though he was happy to be back in Nevada, this was an unfocused time in his life. He was a student-teacher for a few years before deciding he didn't like it. In fact, he hated it. When he wasn't teaching, he was working part-time at a Tinder Box franchise tobacconist in Reno. At night, he played drums in a punk-rock band called the Atomiks—and even went on a national tour—but those gigs, fun as they were, didn't exactly roll in the cash.

Eventually, Giolito dropped out of the teaching program and worked full-time at Tinder Box. While behind the counter, he was fascinated with the older generation of ornery cigar-chomping throwbacks who frequented the shop. They'd shuffle in and out of the store, buying inexpensive cigars without a care about who made them, what type of tobacco was inside or what other people had to say about them.

"These guys would come in and grab some cigars before going out to 'bet on the ponies,' as they all liked to say," recalls Giolito with a chuckle. "I always liked those guys. I wanted to *be* those guys. I really felt like I belonged to whatever time period they came from."

At the time, Tinder Box primarily stocked products from General Cigar Co. and Consolidated Cigar (now Altadis U.S.A.). This was before the cigar boom, and Giolito convinced the owner to bring in smaller cigar brands like Cuba Aliados, made by Rolando Reyes Sr. Another Tinder Box shop not too far away was going out of business and Giolito tried unsuccessfully to convince his manager to purchase the shop and let him run it. In the aftershock of the rejection he came to the idea of opening his own store and separating from Tinder Box completely.

**"I START FROM THE DIRT.
IF I FIND A GREAT
TOBACCO THAT HAS
WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR
IN TERMS OF PALATE
AND OLFATORY, THAT'S
WHAT INSPIRES ME."**



Giolito's Illusione Epernay cigars are blended for balance and refinement rather than power.

"There were a lot of cigars out there the Tinder Box wouldn't carry—enough brands to convince me that not only could I make a living carrying all these other brands, but I could do it in such a way that I wouldn't even be a competitor to Tinder Box."

In 2004, he opened up a smoke shop in Reno called Fumare and it distinguished itself as the first and only dealer of the Davidoff white-label cigars in the area.

"At first, Davidoff told me no because they already had merchants in Las Vegas," Giolito says. "But once they realized that there was an eight-hour difference by car between Reno and Vegas, they said yes."

Becoming a Davidoff store required Giolito to purchase \$30,000 worth of cigars from Davidoff of Geneva up front. While that buy-in ate up a good portion of the Small Business Administration loan he took out to open up his shop, he was confident that it would pay off. The top sellers of the Fumare cigar shop became Davidoff, Cusano (now owned by Davidoff) and Arturo Fuente. It wasn't until he

smoked cigars from Tropical Tobacco, formerly owned by Pedro Martín, that he had his eureka moment: he was going to start his own brand.

"Brands like Condega and Cacique were made with tobaccos that were bright and unique," Giolito recalls of two cigars made by Tropical Tobacco. Coincidentally, Pete Johnson, owner of Tatuaje, was having a side brand produced by Tropical at the time. Hardly knowing him, Giolito called up Johnson and asked for his help in getting Tropical to make him a custom cigar. He agreed, and Giolito purchased the cigars directly from Johnson.

"I bought 50 boxes from Pete," Giolito says. "I never thought I'd sell them all, but figured that a robusto size was the most likely to move. They were all made with Eduardo [Fernandez's] tobacco."

That run of robustos became his house brand. He named the size 88, to signify the year he returned to Nevada and dubbed the brand Illusione, which alluded to the conspiracy theories and illusory tactics that often go hand-in-hand with government cover-ups, black-ops and secret societies who supposedly control the world. The themes always fascinated him, as he's the first to admit, but rather than writing music for episodes of "The X-Files" he projected his interest in conspiracy theories onto his cigars, giving them curious, quirky and unusual names.

It isn't terribly surprising that Giolito also has an interest in UFOs and mysticism. Cigar fans might recall scratching their heads seeing names like MJ 12, MkUltra, or hl. Sometimes Giolito is forthcoming with explanations, sometimes not. The cigar MJ 12, for example, is a toro-sized cigar named after the Majestic 12—a rumored secret team of scientists secretly assembled in 1947 by President Truman himself to investigate alien spacecraft. The MkUltra? That was the code name given to the CIA's secret drug testing program, using mind-altering substances on human subjects. The "mk" part stands for "mind kontrol." As for the hl, it stands for Holy Lance—a long, thin lancero meant to symbolize the biblical spear used to pierce the side of Jesus Christ shortly after he died on the cross. These are only a few examples.

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HENRY CLAY TATTOO TORO
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For a full tasting, see page two.

92 POINTS

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Tatuaje Havana VI Verocú No. 9	Nicaragua	90

A SEASON OF FESTIVALS

CIGAR FESTIVALS ABOUND IN WINTER
and span Nicaragua, Cuba and the Dominican Republic. All are cultural excursions into the world of premium cigars, where manufacturers open their fields and factories to enthusiasts from around the world. See this issue for details on all three events.

PRO CIGAR FESTIVAL
2016

BIG SMOKE IN THE BIG APPLE

IF BIG SMOKE VEGAS WAS TOO FAR AWAY, THERE'S STILL NEW YORK.
This Thursday, Pier 92—an events space on the west side of Manhattan—will welcome cigar smokers from New York City and the metropolitan area to light up en masse for the city's largest smoking party of the year. For one night, cigar lovers will be able to partake in the gentlemanly pastime of premium smoking while interacting with some of the biggest cigar manufacturers in the business. The festivities begin at 6 p.m., and by the time they end at 9:30 p.m., each attendee will walk out with more than 30 premium cigars. For more details on this week's Big Smoke New York, see cigaraficionado.com.

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CIGAR WATCH

FROM THE EDITORS OF CIGAR AFICIONADO
MAY 10 2016 | [SIGN UP](#)

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EXPERIENCE THE WORLD THROUGH THE EYES OF AN ICON

FEATURED CIGAR

Padilla La Pilar Robusto (91 Points)
Padilla creator Ernesto Padilla wanted to create a portfolio of cigars that retails for less than \$8 without compromising on blend quality or construction. He did just that with La Pilar, choosing a high-priming Ecuadorian wrapper, two binders from Nicaragua, and fillers consisting of Nicaraguan Corojo and Cuban-seed Criollo from the Dominican Republic. In April's Cigar Aficionado, the Robusto (5 inches by 54 ring gauge, \$5.50) impressed our panel with notes of cedar and cocoa.

[Padilla Cigars Ratings](#) [Peruse Our Tasting Database](#)

FDA Ruling Threatens Cigar Industry

The Food and Drug Administration has announced tough new regulations on the entire U.S. tobacco industry, including the segment that makes and markets premium, handmade cigars. Despite previous hopes, the premium cigar industry did not get the exemption it and thousands of cigar lovers across the United States had lobbied for. The FDA chose Option One, the toughest of the two routes, casting aside any exemption for premium cigars.

[Full Story](#) [Timeline: FDA & Cigar Regulation](#)

EXPERIENCE THE WORLD THROUGH THE EYES OF AN ICON
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THIS ISSUE SPONSORED BY Macanudo Inspirado. Experience the world through the eyes of an icon with the Macanudo Inspirado line. Created for a global palate and handcrafted with the world's finest tobaccos, Inspirado delivers a unique, international smoking experience. Find Inspirado Orange at fine tobacconists, and Inspirado Black online and in catalogs. Be inspired, visit macanudo.com

Where To Smoke: Lighting Up In London

It is sometimes wonderful when things don't go as planned. That's been the case in London, where faceless legislators imposed a nationwide smoking ban in public places in 2008. The new law had an overnight impact on public smoking in general, but eight years hence the thriving tradition of cigar smoking in clubs, hotels, cigar shops and even fine restaurants has resurfaced through the ingenuity of a coterie of clever purveyors bent on keeping the custom alive. Our guide to smoke-friendly havens reveals Europe's cigar capital has found a way to thrive in the face of tough smoking bans.

[Full Story Here](#) [Check Out More Cigar-Friendly Locations](#)

Montecristo Ships Limited Private Batch II

Altadis U.S.A.'s elite group of cigarmakers and blenders, the Grupo de Maestros, has again made one of their private blends public, but it won't be around for long. The Montecristo Grupo de Maestros Private Batch II is the second installment in the limited-edition series, which pays homage to the group's 250 years of combined experience in the cigar business. The cigars are on their way to retailers now, but only 250 boxes of 100 cigars each will be released.

Go to CigarAficionado.com to Sign Up Today

“Illusione sounded like an inside secret,” Giolito adds. “An indy cigar for people part of an inner circle. Plus, the word Illusione sounded nice. Very European.”

If cryptic ciphers and masonic symbols of the illuminati seem too capricious for a serious cigar, consider this: the cigars inside each box have a more high-minded underlying theme—pre-Sandinista Nicaragua. When Giolito first put his cigars to market, the mission statement was to create a product that tasted like the cigars coming out of Nicaragua before the tobacco fields were decimated by the Sandinista wars of the 1970s.

Having smoked pre-Sandinista cigars from Nicaragua, Giolito sought to recreate this style. Agricultural conglomerate Aganorsa acquired many of the fields that had once been owned by former President Anastasio Somoza and brought them back to fertility. To Giolito, this was key. He found his tobacco, and in 2005 contracted Tropical Tobacco to create six sizes for the Illusione brand. The blend for the core Illusione line (now called the Original Documents) was based around a Corojo-seed tobacco grown on the San José farm in Nicaragua. Through Tropical, the cigars were made at the Raices Cubanas factory in Honduras.

Back in Reno, Giolito received his first shipment at the shop—and rejected the entire lot. By his estimation, the tobaccos he chose and blended in Honduras were not the tobaccos he received.

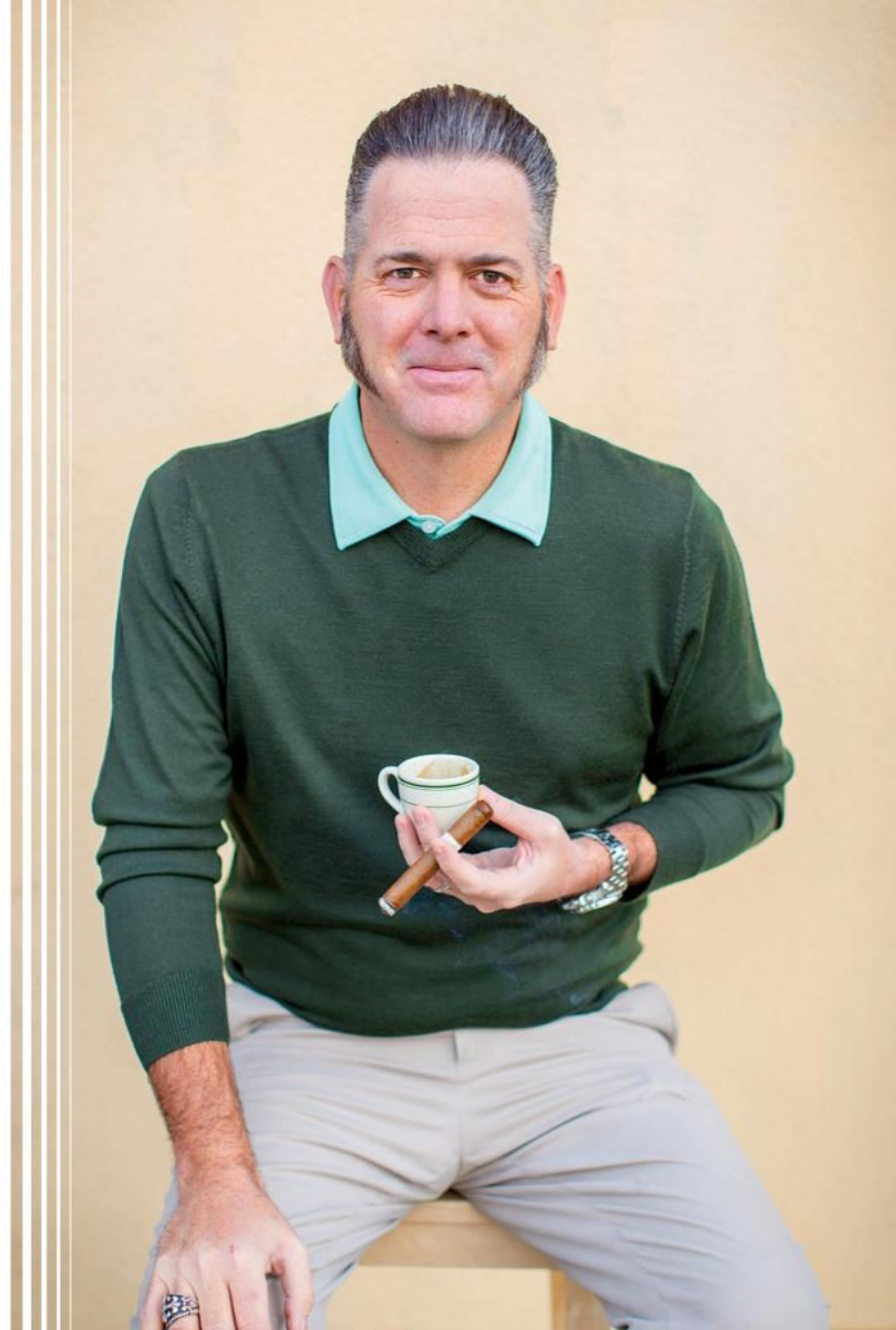
“The tobacco wasn’t right, and they were way off,” Giolito says. “The cigars were brash and one-dimensional. Very crude. And I was angry. I thought they might be trying to screw me. I admit, it was a freshman response. Factories really do want to make the best-quality product. I flew down to the factory and realized that if this thing was going to work, I needed to immerse myself completely in the process, especially on the back end. I learned a lot about tobacco.”

“I told them that they had to make this properly, and that the only way it would be a success was if they made it my way. Sure, I was sticking my neck out by talking like that to these guys, but I was confident that the cigars had the best chance to succeed if they performed the way I wanted them to perform.”

This confidence—and maybe even a touch of paranoia—set the tone for the relationship that Giolito would have with the factory. His first production was 7,000 cigars. Word started to get around online in cigar forums and on a few blogs. And Giolito would often chime in online himself, participating in the conversation and acquainting himself with his new and growing fan base.

In 2006, Illusione made a rather low-key debut at the RTDA trade-show that summer in Las Vegas. Pete Johnson, whose Tatuaje brand was rapidly growing, allowed Giolito to pass out some of his Illusiones while squatting in the Tatuaje booth. The brand got some attention from retailers as well as from this magazine. By the next year, Illusione was rated in *Cigar Insider* (CIGAR AFICIONADO’s twice-monthly newsletter) and the entire brand performed phenomenally. After the results were published, demand naturally grew and the brand quickly became back-ordered.

Since then, the Illusione line and its subsequent brand extensions have only racked up the accolades. In 2007, the Illusione cg:4 was named CIGAR AFICIONADO’s No. 7 cigar of the year. After Giolito released his less powerful, but very complex, Illusione Epernay brand, cigars from that line appeared on the Top 25 list in 2009, 2010 and 2011. His newest regular-production brand, Illusione Fume d’Amour achieved the No. 3 cigar of 2014, and the Illusione Ultra Op. No. 9 earned the No. 6 spot for 2015.



Giolito still mans the register in the shop where 50 boxes of robustos got his brand off the ground. “It helps me keep my finger on the pulse.”

It’s important to note that Giolito has moved production of most of his Illusiones from Raices Cubanas in Honduras to the TABSA factory in Nicaragua. Although Epernay is still made at Raices, the “Original Documents” as well as the Illusione Ultra brand has been migrated to TABSA for logistical reasons. It’s much easier for Giolito to assess and then roll tobacco at the location where it’s stored, as opposed to hauling bale after bale all the way to Honduras.

Despite the critical and commercial success of his Illusione lines, Giolito still mans the cash register at his cigar shop in Reno. Not that he has to—the brand pulls in more income than the shop and has for many years.

“It’s my gig,” Giolito affirms. “It’s where I came from. It helps me keep my finger on the pulse.”

The store sits in a small shopping center just off one of Reno’s main highways—about 375 miles northwest of Area 51. There are mountains in every direction you look, and beyond that, miles and miles of desert.

And for this tobacco retailer, obsessed with international conspiracies and the details of his Central American cigar production, most of the time he’s somewhere out there. ❖

WINE SPECTATOR'S NEW YORK WINE EXPERIENCE

October 20-22, 2016 | New York Marriott Marquis | New York City

Sponsored by the Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation



A unique opportunity to taste the world's finest wines

THE NEW YORK WINE EXPERIENCE is a three-day celebration of exceptional wine, now in its 36th year. No other event delivers so many benchmark wines, the chance to taste with the world's best vintners and the opportunity to meet wine lovers from around the world. All wines come directly from the producers' cellars, including top-scoring bottlings and rare examples of notable older vintages.

YOUR COMPLETE REGISTRATION PACKAGE INCLUDES:

- Friday and Saturday daytime sit-down tastings—top wines from the world's best producers
- Thursday and Friday evening Critics' Choice Grand Tastings—more than 250 wines rated 90 points or better
- Friday and Saturday seated lunches paired with wines
- Saturday evening black-tie Grand Award Banquet—a lavish dinner with special wines and star entertainment

This year's event will include dozens of great wines in fun and educational conducted tastings.

Each wine is presented by the owner and/or winemaker. All are included in your registration fee.

- **France's Château Lafite Rothschild:** A vertical tasting of six vintages from one of Bordeaux's most famous first-growth châteaux, led by Baron Eric de Rothschild.
- **Italy's Brunello di Montalcino:** A tasting of the 2010 vintage, rated 98 points by *Wine Spectator*, from four of Italy's top producers to highlight different styles and sub-regions. Each wine is presented by the owner.
- **Champagne:** Explore the diversity of Champagne with a tasting from four of the region's top producers pouring their têtes de cuvées.
- **Dessert Wines:** Taste four dessert/late-harvest wines, unique, rare and historic, from France, Hungary, Portugal and South Africa. Owners will be on stage to talk about these sensational "sweeties."
- **California's Cabernet Sauvignon:** A tasting of top Cabernet Sauvignons from Pritchard Hill, one of Napa Valley's prime sub-regions, each presented by its producer.
- **Pinot Noir:** Four regions excel with this difficult but alluring grape: Burgundy, California, Oregon and New Zealand. We present a top version from each.
- **Wine Spectator's 2015 Top 10 Wines:** Selected by *Wine Spectator's* board of editors and published in the Dec. 31 Top 100 issue. An annual highlight.
- **Chefs Challenge:** Four dishes, eight wines. Featuring celebrity chefs José Andrés, Emeril Lagasse, Michael Lomonaco and restaurateur Piero Selvaggio. A fun event for all.
- **Wine Stars:** Throughout the weekend there will be individual presentations of great wines by renowned vintners from around the globe, each a star in the world of wine. Famous names include California's Boots Brounstein from Diamond Creek, Washington's Christophe Baron from Cayuse Vineyard, France's Philippe Guigal from E. Guigal and more.
- **Critics' Choice Grand Tastings:** At each evening's tasting, there will be more than 250 great wineries/châteaux from the world's best winegrowing regions each pouring a wine that has been rated 90+ by *Wine Spectator*. All the wineries and châteaux at this tasting have been selected by the *Wine Spectator* board of editors and have earned our Critics' Choice Award. This walk-around event is considered one of the most educational and enjoyable features of the weekend.
- **Grand Award Banquet:** The crowning event of the weekend is a lavish black-tie evening with special wines, great food and star entertainment. The banquet is the natural conclusion to a weekend filled with new wine experiences and new friends. Banquet tickets are available only to guests of weekend registrants and members of the wine industry.

Other great tastings to be announced.

AGENDA / TICKETS / HOTEL

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20

Critics' Choice Grand Tastings 6:30* pm – 10:00 pm

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21

Daytime tastings and lunch 9:00 am – 3:00 pm

Critics' Choice Grand Tastings 6:30* pm – 10:00 pm

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22

Daytime tastings and lunch 9:00 am – 3:00 pm

Grand Award Banquet 6:30 pm

COMPLETE PACKAGE \$2,495

Includes Thursday and Friday Critics' Choice Grand Tastings, Friday and Saturday daytime seminars, luncheons, conducted tastings and Saturday Grand Award Banquet with entertainment to be announced.

GRAND AWARD BANQUET ONLY \$400

Saturday evening—dinner and entertainment. Banquet tickets are available only to guests of Complete Package registrants and members of the wine industry.

CRITICS' CHOICE GRAND TASTING TICKETS ONLY \$345

Thursday 7:30* – 10:00 pm **or** Friday 7:30* – 10:00 pm

You will receive an immediate e-ticket.

*6:30-7:30 is reserved for Complete Package registrants and the guests for whom they have purchased tickets. 7:30 pm is the admission time for people for have purchased Grand Tasting tickets only and are not attending the entire weekend.

HOTEL INFORMATION

The New York Marriott Marquis has reserved a block of rooms for Wine Experience attendees.

CONTACT: New York Marriott Marquis
1535 Broadway • New York, NY 10036
Tel: 212.398.1900 or 800.266.9432

Reserve your room online at
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Order your tickets online at
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Questions? Email: events@mshanken.com

IMPORTANT NOTICE: The New York Wine Experience is sponsored by the Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation, which underwrites grants and scholarships to students pursuing careers in the wine industry. Attendance is tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.
Cancellation Policy: COMPLETE PACKAGE — A full refund is available until July 1, 2016. After that date, until September 15, there is a \$500 per person cancellation fee. After September 15 there are no refunds.
GRAND TASTING AND BANQUET TICKETS — A full refund is available until October 1, 2016. After that date there are no refunds for any tickets. Registrations, Banquet tickets, and Grand Tasting tickets may be transferred to another person at any time. Event sponsor reserves the right to refuse admission to any applicant. Must be 21 or older to attend.

Havana's Humidor Heaven

Humidores Habana builds some of Cuba's most elaborate wooden sculptures, designed to store the country's greatest cigars BY GORDON MOTT



The craftsmen at Humidores Habana turn wood into some of Cuba's most elaborate humidors, some of them capable of holding hundreds of cigars.

They stand as sentinels, half a dozen or so lined up in front of the stage at the annual Festival del Habano gala dinners, massive wooden paeans to Cuba's most famous cigar brands and the factories where they are made. Each waits to be auctioned off for hundreds of thousands of dollars. Each is also the work of master craftsmen, toiling away in neighborhoods around Havana and other Cuban cities, competing for the honor to build these carved masterpieces.

One of the best known is Humidores Habana. Tucked away on a street in Cuba's capital far from the fancy tourist hotels of the Malecón, any outsider hoping to find it must stop three or four times and ask for directions. José Ernesto Aguilera started the operation in 1994, and oversees the factory. He is a simple, proud woodworker eager to show off his wares. To describe the main factory and warehouse as decrepit would be an understatement, but even that old metal-roof building is an



upgrade from where he started 22 years ago, a low-ceilinged warren of tiny rooms in a basement with signs warning to duck your head. To identify his machinery would take a historian; most of the drills and lathes, with old American trademarks like Craftsman and DeWalt, date back to prerevolutionary days.

"I am very proud," says Aguilera, an earnest, wide-eyed artisan. "These humidors are the essence of Cuba. We lack a lot of material and technical equipment, but we are very proud of what we've done." He adds that part of his pride stems from knowing his work has helped raise more than \$3 million over the years for the Cuban health care system.

Aguilera launched his business as a metalworking operation back in the early '90s, following his original dream to earn enough to start a jewelry factory. But in early 1998, he discovered the need for humidors, and began working with wood. He was asked by Habanos S.A., the Cuban cigar monopoly, to build humidors for the Festival del Habano in 2005, one for the brand of Alejandro Robaina and one for Punch. These, like all the humidors auctioned at the Habanos Festival, are not desktop models. Each stands several feet tall and several feet wide, and can hold hundreds of cigars. The Punch humidor was given the nod as the best humidor of that year's festival, according to Aguilera.

"From one day to the next, our life changed," Aguilera says.

Today, he has 30 employees crowded into the old basement and the newer warehouse, working on five contracts simultaneously for clients in Europe. He has crafted humidors for the 135th celebration of J.J. Fox in Dublin, for the 50th anniversary of Intertabak in Europe and another humidor for the distributor of Cuban cigars in Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

"For the last three years, we have been the largest exporter of Cuba artisan works," Aguilera says.

He also works regularly with Habanos S.A. making humidors for the festival, and has earned the privilege of making Cohiba humidors (which almost always receive the highest bids at the event) at least three times. He says the process begins with a design concept, which is sent to a



Aguilera (top left, standing center in white) surrounded by the Humidores Habana factory craftsmen. The company makes masterpieces that hold cigars, including a large Punch humidor (top right) meant to replicate a cigar press, as well as cylinder humidors (above).

cultural association, which then presents the designs to Habanos. At a convocation of all the humidor companies, Habanos chooses the designs it wants. "We have a designer, Carilyn de la Vega, at the National Design School, who is doing our designs now," says Aguilera. He says she executes the drawings of concepts from the factory's team, which includes him.

Walking around the factory, there are signs of the many projects in process. Wood pieces are being fashioned on saws and lathes, and in one area, workers are making the marquetry, the multiple layers of wood that are cut to create intricate designs, with different colors of wood in thin strips. In one room, the harsh odors of varnish drift into the driveway. Each of the humidor's drawers are tested with weights to imitate cigars, to ensure they work properly. In another room, stacks of recovered wood beams and planks of wood cut from old furniture and other recovered items of aged cedar and *caoba*, are stored for use in future projects.

Aguilera's goal of being a jeweler is long in the past, and he has a new one in mind. "We want to make the best humidors in the world," he says. ❖

For a photo gallery of Aguilera's factory and work, visit cigaraficionado.com

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THE GOOD LIFE MAGAZINE FOR MEN

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Marvin R. Shanken, center, with, from left, New York Knicks all-star Carmelo Anthony, former NBA star John Salley, and former NFL linebacker Ray Lewis.

Night To Remember

Sports Stars Gather at \$1.8 Million Charity Dinner for Prostate Cancer Research

BY DAVID SAVONA AND GREGORY MOTTOLA • PHOTOGRAPHS BY JONATHAN LOCKWOOD SMITH

Ray Lewis, he of the hulking biceps and two Super Bowl rings, stood at the front of the room, a cigar clamped in his massive hands. Standing next to him were Carmelo Anthony, star of the New York Knicks, former New York Yankee Gary Sheffield, who hit more than 500 home runs in his career, and John Salley, who won four NBA titles during his playing days. Lewis spoke about learning the art of smoking cigars from his grandfather.

“He said, ‘When you understand why I smoke cigars, you’ll understand what it means to be a man,’” said Lewis, who reigned supreme as a linebacker in a 17-year NFL career. “After he passed away, I lit up a cigar. Now I understand what he meant.”

The sports stars had gathered for charity, the 22nd annual Night to Remember, created by CIGAR AFICIONADO editor and publisher Marvin R. Shanken. The event raised \$1.8 million for the Prostate Cancer Foundation and set a new benchmark for charity with a single bottle of wine.

The fine, chain-link curtains shimmered, the reflecting pool bubbled and Shanken stepped into the spotlight’s reddish glow as he turned brown

paper bags into money in front of 230 distinguished guests in tuxedos. He opened the bidding on five bottles of mystery wines. Without knowing the contents of what was inside (and understanding they would have to share the wine that night with their tablemates) the audience bid heavily, and each sold for \$60,000 or more. In the case of the final bottle, much, much more.

The wines were astounding: A bottle of Quinta do Noval Nacional vintage Port from 1963, a Magnum of 1959 Petrus, Château Mouton-Rothschild from 2005, Château Haut-Brion from 1970. Shanken brought out the fifth and final bottle—a 1961 Chateau d’Yquem. It was bought and redonated, again and again, until the total hit an outstanding \$510,000. It was a record for the event—more than any other bottle has ever raised.

More auction items followed, and brought in hundreds of thousands more. The auction lots were exquisite, tastes of the very finest things in life, including trips to Cuba, Scotland and the Dominican Republic, collections of rare whiskeys and classic wines, humidors brimming with rare cigars (some of them Cuban) and a mystery box packed with treasures.



Seated at the head table, from left to right, Michael Milken, Hazel Shanken, Rudolph W. Giuliani, Chuck Wagner. Standing, from left to right, Carmelo Anthony, John Salley, Marvin R. Shanken and Rush Limbaugh.



The Millennium Management LLC table. Seated, from left: Rick, David, Michael and Jeff Gelband and Israel Englander. Standing, from left: David Nolan, John Novogratz, Sy Lorne, Michael Englander and Hyung Lee.



Jim Clerkin of Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy (LVMH) enjoys the evening dinner and spirited auction with Patrick Kennedy and Wayne Walsh.



Executive editor David Savona (left) and senior contributing editor Gordon Mott (right) of CIGAR AFICIONADO taking bids during the charity auction.



After dinner, when the plates are cleared, guests are given the OK to smoke. Las Vegas cigar retailer Michael Frey gives Mary Padrón a light for her cigar.



Nish Patel, Matt Arcella and Frank Arcella during cocktail hour in the Four Seasons' iconic Grill Room, home and birthplace of the "power lunch."



More than 230 guests attended the 22nd annual Night to Remember charity cigar dinner auction, which took place in the Four Seasons' Pool Room.

The final lot, “Marvin’s Mystery Box,” began with a specially crafted Elie Bleu humidor filled with a king’s trove of contents, including a guaranteed winning ticket for next year’s Super Bowl (a bet placed on each team), a trip on a private jet, a case of Château Mouton-Rothschild wine, and a two-year lease on a new Fisker Karma, a luxury electric car. The humidor itself is a work of art, inlaid with Cuban bands that required the permission of the Cuban government to produce. The superlot commanded a final auction price of \$200,000, which was won by radio star Rush Limbaugh.

It would be no exaggeration to call the Night To Remember the grandest cigar dinner of the year. Where else would one find so many stalwarts of the cigar, wine, spirits and financial industries all in one room? Where else do wine bottles in brown paper bags command more than half a million dollars at auction?

This year, the Night to Remember had a few surprises. The Garcia family, makers of the My Father Le Bijou 1922 Torpedo Box Pressed (CIGAR AFICIONADO’s Cigar of the Year), were brought to the stage and recognized for their achievement. Their cigar was one of three handed out at the conclusion of the dinner.

Then Shanken surprised three members of the audience by inducting them into the cigar world’s most exclusive club: The CIGAR AFICIONADO Hall of Fame (see page 148).

Litto Gomez of La Flor Dominicana Cigars, Jorge Padrón of Padrón Cigars and Rocky Patel of Rocky Patel Premium Cigars each came up to the podium to be honored for their career achievements in the cigar industry. The new additions brought the Hall of Fame up to 18 inductees.

“Thank you, Marvin, for everything you do for this industry, for my company and for charity,” said Gomez as he accepted the award. “I’m very humbled to be recognized for this honor.”

The subject of cigars and cigar-smoking freedom was a popular one, as cigars were lit after the conclusion of dinner. “We used to do this at the ‘21’ Club. At the time, we could smoke before, during and after dinner,” said Shanken. When Michael Bloomberg became mayor and implemented a tough smoking ban, it was outgoing Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani who helped ease the restrictions. “If it weren’t for the help of Rudy Giuliani, we wouldn’t be here right now.”

Over the years this dinner has raised more than \$20 million for prostate cancer research.

Giuliani also addressed the crowd. “If I light up a cigar in the park, a police officer will give me a summons,” said Giuliani. “If I light up a joint of marijuana, he’ll pat me on the back. If we go to jail tonight, it will be me, Marvin and Rush Limbaugh all locked up together.”

Foundation founder Michael Milken spoke about the direct effect of the money raised from the dinner. “In the last 20 years, 80 percent of people with prostate cancer, more than 1.6 million men, are still alive due to advances in prostate cancer research,” he said. “I am one of them and I thank you all.”

The guests smoked the finest cigars, drank sublime wine and ate like kings—all for a good cause. Funding for the research has been an invaluable source in extending and improving the quality of life for thousands of cancer victims. At each Night To Remember, every puff of every cigar and every sip of wine and whiskey brings the world that much closer to a cure. ❖



Gary Winterhalter, Andrew Fabricant, Peter Kane, Kappana Ramanandan, Ed Rabin and John Miller enjoying cigars at the cocktail hour.



Litto Gomez, the maker of La Flor Dominicana cigars, being welcomed to the CIGAR AFICIONADO Hall of Fame by Shanken.



Members of the head table watch the auction as Shanken presents the mystery wines to the winning bidders and reveals each wine's identity.



Tom White, Basil Hourani, Jamie Coulter, Jeff Johnson and Michael Vixon enjoying cigars, cocktails and Moët & Chandon Champagne.



Christina Suarez, Marvin R. Shanken, Meera Levin and Cynthia Fuente-Suarez at the Night to Remember cocktail and cigar hour.



Cigarmaker Rocky Patel (center) with a magnum of 1959 Petrus that he will share with tablemates Ray Lewis (left) and Gary Sheffield (right).

cigar
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HALL of FAME

In 1997, CIGAR AFICIONADO held its first Hall of Fame dinner. More than 400 industry members and cigar lovers joined together at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Manhattan to honor six legends of the cigar world.

In 2012, in conjunction with the 20th anniversary of CIGAR AFICIONADO magazine, we inducted nine additional members at the Grand Havana Room in New York City.

This past April, at our annual Night to Remember charity cigar dinner at the Four Seasons Restaurant, we added three new members to this exclusive club: Litto Gomez, the maker of La Flor Dominicana cigars in the Dominican Republic; Jorge Padrón, president of Nicaragua's Padrón Cigars; and Rocky Patel, the owner of the Rocky Patel brand from Honduras and Nicaragua.



Edgar M. Cullman

CLASS OF 1997
1918-2011



Zino Davidoff

CLASS OF 1997
1906-1994



Carlos Fuente Sr.

CLASS OF 1997



Frank Llaneza

CLASS OF 1997
1920-2010



Stanford Newman

CLASS OF 1997
1916-2006



Angel Oliva Sr.

CLASS OF 1997
1906-1996



Carlos Fuente Jr.

CLASS OF 2012



Hendrik Kelner

CLASS OF 2012



Robert Levin

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Benjamin Menendez

CLASS OF 2012



José Orlando Padrón

CLASS OF 2012



Ernesto Perez-Carrillo

CLASS OF 2012



Nestor Plasencia

CLASS OF 2012



Manuel Quesada

CLASS OF 2012



José Seijas

CLASS OF 2012



Litto Gomez

Co-owner, La Flor Dominicana, Tamboril, Dominican Republic

When Litto Gomez entered the cigar industry in 1994 with a brand called Los Libertadores, he was a virtual newcomer. Twenty-two years later, Gomez has transformed his La Flor Dominicana mark (the name was changed in 1996) from an unknown entity into a cigar brand embraced by connoisseurs and critics alike for its powerhouse blends and innovative vitolas.

Born in Spain but raised in Uruguay, Gomez moved to Toronto, Canada in 1973 after being denied an American visa. He would later move to Miami and open a successful jewelry store, but after a savage robbery, he closed the shop and turned his attention to a new venture: cigars.

With Ines Lorenzo (who is now his wife) as his business partner, Gomez began making La Flor Dominicana cigars out of a tiny factory with only four rolling stations. Early La Flor Dominicans were mild. Gomez broke free of the mild cigar mold when he released a unique shape in 1997 called the El Jocko Perfecto No. 1. Later he created The Chisel, a figurado with a wedge-shaped head that was eventually trademarked. He grows much of his own tobacco.

Gomez's knack for innovation has been lauded by consumers and critics, as he makes nearly 4 million cigars per year and has appeared on CIGAR AFICIONADO's Top 25 list every year. Gomez's factory is now in Tamboril, and while his son Anthony has recently begun getting involved in the business, the 61-year-old Litto shows no signs of slowing down.



Jorge Padrón

President, Padrón Cigars Inc., Miami, Florida

When Jorge Padrón began working full time for his father, José Orlando Padrón, the company was already 28 years old and had sold almost 100 million cigars. But some 90 percent of these sales were concentrated in Miami. Fresh out of graduate school and armed with a master's degree, Jorge had an idea: Develop a new, younger customer base by expanding distribution. In 1993, Jorge attended the company's first trade show in hopes of boosting national sales, but the reaction wasn't as strong as he hoped.

Rather than accept defeat, Jorge went back to the factory and worked with his father on creating the company's first premium brand: the Padrón 1964 Anniversary Series. This special cigar was a hit with consumers and critics from day one, as its unique, box-pressed shape and blend of power and flavor ultimately shifted the palate of the U.S. cigar enthusiast.

Padrón's growth could not have been possible without Jorge's vision and his strict adherence to his father's philosophy of quality over quantity.

Today, more than 6.5 million Padrón cigars are sold annually, and the company has won CIGAR AFICIONADO's Cigar of the Year award three times, the most of any cigarmaker, while consistently scoring high in magazine tastings. Jorge continues to learn from his father, who was inducted into the CIGAR AFICIONADO Hall of Fame in 2012, making them the second father-and-son team to be honored in this way.



Rocky Patel

Owner, Rocky Patel Premium Cigars, Naples, Florida

A survivor of the cigar boom, Rakesh Patel, better known as Rocky, is widely regarded as the hardest working person in the cigar industry. In a given year, he logs more than 300 days and 150,000 miles on the road away from his home in Naples, Florida, all so he can personally hand customers a cigar from his vast portfolio. Patel's work ethic has paid off immensely, as his company has grown from 150,000 cigars in its first year to nearly 20 million cigars annually.

Patel was not born into a legacy tobacco family but in India. As a teenager, he moved to Green Bay, Wisconsin, where he put his natural salesmanship to work selling door-to-door. He became a successful entertainment and product liability lawyer in Los Angeles, and it was in 1995 that he turned his focus to cigars and established the Indian Tabac Cigar Co. with a silent partner.

At that time, he was contracting out all of his production. In 2006, he changed his company name to Rocky Patel Premium Cigars and, three years later, he opened his own facility, Tabacalera Villa Cuba S.A., or TaviCusa, in Estelí, Nicaragua. This factory now encompasses 8,000 square feet. The 55-year-old Patel also now grows tobacco on two farms in Nicaragua.

Additionally, Patel serves on the board of the Cigar Rights of America organization, and often goes to Washington, D.C., to lobby against needless cigar legislation and taxation.

—Andrew Nagy

CigarAficionado.com's

CIGAR REVIEWS

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Ratings & Reviews

REVIEW | Fuente Fuente OpusX Lost City Piramide

93
POINTS

 DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

 52

 MEDIUM-FULL



Tasting Note: A slightly pressed torpedo whose lush, full draw imparts a rich, sweet smoke replete with notes of baking spices and raisins. An earthiness emerges along with notes of caramel and almond. Complex and delicious.

Body: Medium-Full **Size:** Figurado **Ring Gauge:** 52
Length: 6 3/8" **Filler:** Dom. Rep. **Binder:** Dom. Rep. **Wrapper:** Dom. Rep.
Issue: Cigar Aficionado, Apr 01, 2016 **Price:** \$31.00

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There are no additional reviews of this cigar.

Cigar Aficionado's 100-Point Scale
Classic: 95-100
Outstanding: 90-94
Very good to excellent: 80-89
Average to good commercial quality: 70-79
Don't waste your money: 0-69

Registered users can add this cigar to a personal humidor.

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Ratings & Reviews

REVIEW | Quai d'Orsay Robusto Diplomatico Exclusivo Francia

91
POINTS

 CUBA

 48

 MEDIUM



Tasting Note: With a near-perfect burn and lush draw, this robusto starts with almond and nutmeg intonations and develops a molasses and cinnamon sweetness.

Body: Medium **Size:** Robusto **Ring Gauge:** 48 **Length:** 5"
Filler: Cuba **Binder:** Cuba **Wrapper:** Cuba
Issue: Cigar Aficionado, Apr 01, 2016 **Price:** €9.80
Box Date: Aug. 2015

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More Reviews of This Cigar
Issue: Cigar Insider, Jan 05, 2016
Score: 91
With a near-perfect burn and lush draw, this robusto starts with almond and nutmeg intonations and develops a molasses and cinnamon sweetness.

Cigar Aficionado's 100-Point Scale
Classic: 95-100
Outstanding: 90-94
Very good to excellent: 80-89
Average to good commercial quality: 70-79
Don't waste your money: 0-69

Registered users can add this cigar to a personal humidor.

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Ratings & Reviews

REVIEW | Alec Bradley Nica Puro Rosado Torpedo

91
POINTS

 NICARAGUA

 54

 MEDIUM-FULL



Tasting Note: A torpedo that starts toasty with a note of cocoa powder but develops a rich, sweeter character, taking on elements of honey, wood and nuts.

Body: Medium-Full **Size:** Figurado **Ring Gauge:** 54
Length: 6 1/4" **Filler:** Nicaragua **Binder:** Nicaragua **Wrapper:** Nicaragua
Issue: Cigar Aficionado, Feb 01, 2016 **Price:** \$8.00

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More Reviews of This Cigar
Issue: Cigar Insider, Dec 01, 2015
Score: 91
A torpedo that starts toasty with a note of cocoa powder but develops a rich, sweeter character, taking on elements of honey, wood and nuts.

Cigar Aficionado's 100-Point Scale
Classic: 95-100
Outstanding: 90-94
Very good to excellent: 80-89
Average to good commercial quality: 70-79
Don't waste your money: 0-69

Registered users can add this cigar to a personal humidor.

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During a nearby wedding reception, Jim Kolb, Jason Miller, Tom Kolb, Tom Volbrecht, Russ Borchardt and Ken Kolb defy smoking rules at Madison Area Technical College in Madison, Wisconsin (until security kicked them out).



Travis Stewart, Dave Sarowski and Michael Williams have a chance to meet Rocky Patel of Rocky Patel Premium Cigars Inc. after Patel spoke about cigar rights and legislation at Diebel's Sportsmens Gallery in Leawood, Kansas.



Puffing away in the Hotel Nacional in Havana, from left: Mr. and Mrs. Ranald Macdonald of Boisdale Restaurant Group, Jemma Freeman of Hunters & Frankau, humidor maker Daniel Marshall and Toby Brocklehurst.



Bob McCabe, John O'Shea, Steve Despenza, Doug Wilder, Jim McWilliams, Corky Corcoran and Gerry Conry take a halftime break for a few premium cigars at O'Carroll's Recovery Room in Mineola, New York.



Euclide Cecchin, Dave Cecchin and Fulvio Tramontina enjoy some fine Oliva Serie V cigars in front of a pair of Ferraris on a sunny day in Windsor, Ontario.



Marc Feuerbach, Chris Carneal, George Barbar and Jay Gunsten light up fine cigars while attending the 2015 Masters at Augusta National in Georgia.



Dr. Martin Alexander, Ted Herman, Jesse Meyers and Dr. Art Ribak escape the cold with great cigars at the Davidoff Cigar Lounge in Greenwich, Connecticut.



Beth Geist rings in her 28th birthday with cigars and libations alongside grandfather Bob Geist, father Jeff Geist and fiancée Kyle Murray in Columbus, Ohio.



Good friends Chris Meyer, David Bootcheck, Jay Molino, Jeff May and Bob Greenhalgh enjoy Memorial Day Weekend cigars in Redington Beach, Florida.



D'Arcy Crites brings a copy of a certain cigar magazine with him to Cuba and hoists it next to Serguey Kéké at the Melia Cayo Guillermo resort cigar lounge.



Corrections officers Harry and Maureen Draaisma welcome daughter Gracie into the family business at her graduation in Maple Ridge, British Columbia.



In memoriam of the late Jim Turner, who celebrated special moments in life with a cigar, friends and family gather at his home in Treasure Island, Florida.



Sean Hall enjoys a Fuente cigar with friends in Kiln, Mississippi, after becoming the first person with Cerebral Palsy to complete the Spartan Trifecta series.



Steve and Laurie Courter of Austin, Texas, sail the Baltic Sea while savoring premium cigars in the Humidor Room of Silversea's *Silver Whisper* cruise liner.



José Osornio and Don Santos Lujan celebrate an afternoon Cuban-style with Havana Club and a humidor filled with fine Cuban cigars in Andrews, Texas.



Brothers Glenn and Darren Womack indulge in fine Cuban cigars after completing the South Coast Adventure Race in Windsor, Ontario, on June 20, 2015.



Dwight and Vergil Stewart puff on a couple of fine premium cigars while taking in a Floyd Mayweather fight at the Suite Food Lounge in Atlanta, Georgia.



Golf-and-cigar buddies Russ Williams, Tony Oury and Reg Overstreet light up Oliva Serie G cigars at the 2015 U.S. Open at Chambers Bay in Washington.



In Richland, Washington, friends toast with cigars at a going-away party for their friend Tony. From top left: Trent, Aaron, Tony, Kurt, Mike and Kyle. Bottom: Fred, Carrie, Oliver and Rachel.



Escaping the city for some peace and quiet, Matt Szukics kicks back with a Daniel Marshall cigar while fishing with his dog Maverick on the Monksville Reservoir in Ringwood, New Jersey.



Ryan, Sherri, Kirsten, Gregory and Natalie Meeder celebrate Ryan's graduation from college and Kirsten's graduation from law school by enjoying a family smoke in Coral Gables, Florida.

Confidence.
: a feeling or belief that you can do something well or succeed at something.

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Regular ...	\$275	\$245

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	Full Price	Early Bird*
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Regular ...	\$275	\$245

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Father and daughter Larry and Sierra Garcia of San Diego, California, commemorate Sierra's graduation from college with premium cigars.



Chris and Jeniffer Fuller enjoy E.P. Carrillo Short Run and La Palina Black cigars at the Little Havana Cigar Factory in Miami, Florida.



Bill Mueller shares a few fine cigars with his daughter Marie and new son-in-law Paul Conley in the face of a thunderstorm at their backyard, springtime wedding in Wadsworth, Ohio.



Bob Owens marks his 75th birthday with a "hard hat" dive in Key Largo, Florida, followed by a celebratory H. Upmann Havoc cigar.



Michael Holdegraver shares a Rocky Patel Edge with his father Michael after graduating from infantry training in Columbus, Georgia.



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- Mauricio Córdoba,
General Manager of
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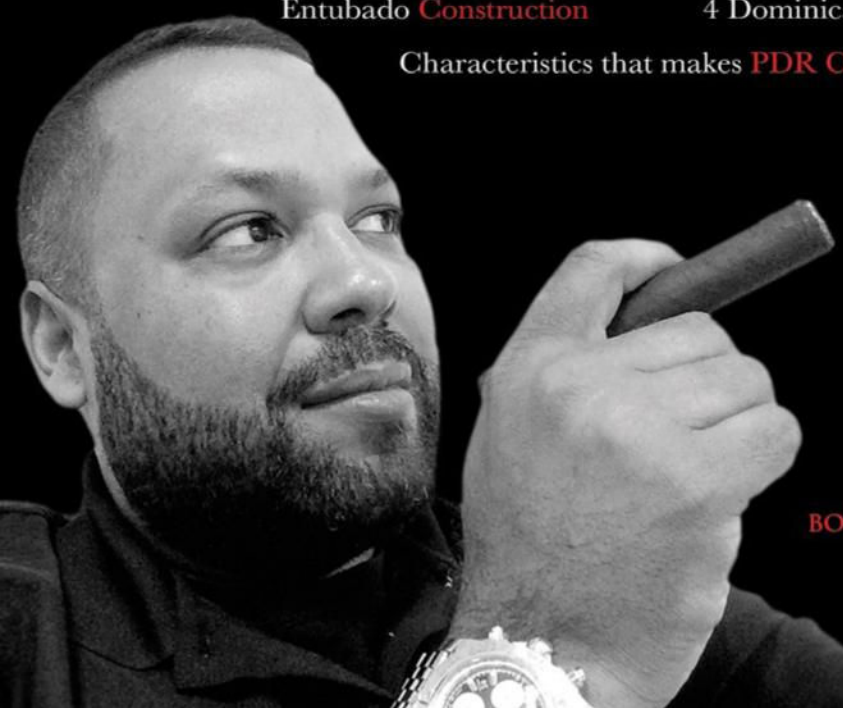
Randy and Paige Morris share some quality father-daughter time over cigars on the 14th green of Seven Canyons Sedona Golf Course in Sedona, Arizona.



High school football alumni of the Forest Park Chargers remember their 1973 championship season over a few premium cigars on Lake Oconee in Georgia.



Congratulations to the newlyweds! Friends and family gather around husband and wife Courtney Walsh and David Eitler at Wentworth by the Sea in Rye, New Hampshire. The wedding reception culminated with guests enjoying a variety of fine cigars from My Father and Macanudo to Aging Room Small Batch.

A black and white photograph of a man with a beard, looking thoughtfully to the side while holding a cigar in his hand.

Entubado **Construction** 4 Dominican **Puros** Silky Oily **Wrapper**

Characteristics that makes **PDR CIGARS** special, 10 years **strong ...**



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Two photographs of cigars. The top one shows a cigar with a red and gold band, labeled "PDR CIGARS" and "93 RATED Cigar Aficionado". The bottom one shows a cigar with a blue and gold band, labeled "PDR CIGARS" and "1975".



On her wedding day, Anna Elias-Shaffer enjoys a fine premium cigar with her father Tom Elias and new husband Harley Shaffer in Johnstown, Pennsylvania.



Joe Collins, Charlie Arenholz and Steve Norman of Smoker Friendly puff their premium cigars at Norman's annual Kentucky Derby Party in Naples, Florida.



The Cattle Point Cigar Club lights up in Victoria, British Columbia. From left: Werner Stills, Joe Calenda, John Anderson, Dean Freeman and Tim Campbell.



J. Sharp Gillespy VI, right, celebrates his graduation from Georgia Institute of Technology with his father Sharp V and friend Jacob Velcoff in Atlanta, Georgia.



Newlywed Ryan Clancy marks his wedding day with a Drew Estate Acid Smoke surrounded by his father, brothers, uncles and cousins in Boulder, Colorado.



On vacation in Cuba, Joe Muro, Mark Kucky and Gary Helbling savor fine premium cigars while taking in the sunshine in Havana's Central Plaza.

CIGAR AFICIONADO (ISSN #1063-7885) is published bimonthly by M. Shanken Communications, Inc., Worldwide Plaza, 825 Eighth Avenue, 33rd floor, New York, NY 10019. (212) 684-4224. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Address changes and subscription inquiries: CIGAR AFICIONADO, P.O. Box 37367 Boone, IA 50037-0367; call 1-800-365-4929; or email cgacustserv@cdsfulfillment.com. Subscription rates: United States, \$19.95 per year; Canada, \$38.00 per year; all other foreign, \$56.00. Subscriptions are payable in U.S. funds. TO ORDER A NEW SUBSCRIPTION, call 1-800-992-2442, email cgacustserv@cdsfulfillment.com, or write to aforementioned Boone address. To order back issues, call 1-800-761-4099. Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned, and no responsibility can be assumed for such material. All "Letters to the Editor" should be sent to the editor at the aforementioned New York address. All rights in letters sent to CIGAR AFICIONADO will be treated as unconditionally assigned for publication and copyright purposes and subject to CIGAR AFICIONADO's unrestricted right to edit. CIGAR AFICIONADO® is a registered trademark of M. Shanken Communications, Inc. All rights reserved. Nothing may be reprinted or reproduced in whole or in part without written permission from the publisher. Copyright © 2015, M. Shanken Communications, Inc. To sell CIGAR AFICIONADO call: 1-800-344-0763.



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1 MOTORCYCLING GOES ELECTRIC—ZERO MOTORCYCLES

The obvious attractions of electric motorcycles are environmental and budgetary. But that's scratching the surface with Zero Motorcycles' high-performance (zero to 60 in 3.3 seconds) rides. The motor is almost silent, and a direct-drive powertrain means no shifting. They plug into any 120-volt outlet, so you're not tethered to charging stations. Quick charge options are available. Also prepare to see a host of maintenance issues (oil change, lube jobs, tune-ups, transmission and powertrain) disappear. zeromotorcycles.com

2 PRO STOWING—STATPACKS

Given the intense challenges that emergency medical workers face, the essential gear they haul needs to be stowed where it's well-protected and easily accessed. That durability creates great crossover application for camping and sporting in the products of Statpacks, a Utah company that supplies firemen and EMTs. The gear is overengineered for those needs: quick access zippers, heavy-duty materials that can take a beating and copious storage space. Many Statpacks (\$45–\$290) come in bright colors for night visibility, but we prefer the cool look of tactical black. statpacks.com

3 BENCH-MADE BENCHMARK—MICHAEL ANDREWS BESPOKE

Founder Michael Andrews was an M&A lawyer when, 10 years ago, he discerned a need for true custom clothing in New York City, went back to school and opened his own tailor shop. Based on exacting measurements, it makes from-the-ground-up bespoke suits (starting at \$1,795, with a refundable pattern fee), shirts, coats and more, offering a choice of 10,000 fabrics. The goal is to make the client the creative director, while offering expert guidance. Wedding gear is a specialty. michaelandrewsbespoke.com

4 STUCK ON YOU—TIE MAGS

As a college student Paul Robert noticed that the back side of his necktie would annoyingly pop out from behind the front end and ruin his carefully put-together look. A lightbulb went on and he created the Tie Mag (\$29.95). Essentially, it's a pair of super-strong magnets—one is basic black, the other a piece of decorative metal—between which you place the two ends of your tie and your shirt placket. It takes the place of a clumsy tie clip or a pin that might damage the silk. Not wearing a tie? Put it on your lapel. tiemags.com

5 GETTING A FAIR SHAKE—SHAKER 33

Every year brings new car models and cell phone releases. It's time a new cocktail shaker solved some mixological snafus. All-metal cobbler shakers freeze together. More professional Boston shakers (glass and tin) require two hands to shake and strain. The new Shaker 33 (\$39.99), made of high-impact, BPA-free plastic, provides insulation, keeping the drink cold and allowing easy access with its leakproof, rubber-gasket opening. Available in see-through or black, with a built-in strainer: one side for fast pouring and another for fine straining. The 24-oz.-capacity shaker is dishwasher safe. shaker33.com

6 A LOVE AFFAIR WITH SUMMER—THE END: MONTAUK, N.Y.

It all started with a teenager's dream to meet the Rolling Stones in Montauk, the Eastern tip of New York's Long Island. It ended with a book of photographs that would be termed “the ultimate homage to the sun-kissed life.” Except it didn't quite end there. Michael Dweck's landmark book *The End: Montauk, N.Y.*, which details a famed, but fading, surfing subculture is available in an expanded 10th-Anniversary Limited Art Edition. Don't wince at the \$3,000 price tag. First-éditions command 30 grand. ditchplainpress.com

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